

JOAN OF RAINBOW SPRINGS

FRANCES·MARIAN·MITCHELL

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"SEE, HE IS ENCHANTED, RODNEY!"—Page 229.

JOAN OF RAINBOW SPRINGS

BY
FRANCES MARIAN MITCHELL

ILLUSTRATED BY F. VAUX WILSON



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JOAN OF RAINBOW SPRINGS

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TO MY MOTHER
IN MEMORY OF MY BROTHER

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JOAN OF RAINBOW SPRINGS

CHAPTER I

IT was Christmas Eve. The Snow King was abroad that night with a great, wild wind.

As the night grew old, the wind gradually strengthened to a gale and turned the steady downfall of white snowflakes into a lashing scourge. It whipped the soft mantle of white from the earth and sent it swirling through the frigid air as if it regretted the moments spent in gentle drifting. Shrieking and howling, it rattled windows and tore at the roofs of the sedate white houses that flanked the main streets of the little town of Orion, Vermont, even as it rattled windows and tore at the roofs of other houses in many other towns, for the wind was on mischief bent that night.

It swept up the tracks of the one car line Orion boasted, and took a fiendish joy in burying the cold rails under an icy shroud of white.

Out toward the end of the car line a square white house stands at a dignified distance back from the street. From the sidewalk to the door runs a well-beaten path bounded on each side by great silver maple trees, their gaunt limbs now ice-bound and unsuggestive of the sap of spring hidden in their hearts.

With a shrilly whistled song of rage the blizzard caught the square white house in its icy grasp and shook it until it quivered and creaked. With a howl of joy it sent a sparkling drift of snow into the long hall, for the outer door stood slightly ajar. So had it stood every Christmas Eve for sixty years, because on that storm-scourged Christmas Eve so many years before, an old gentleman and a beautiful maiden, who had been lost in the snow, had found their way to the square white house, through the sudden opening of the outer door by one within who had heard their cry for help during a momentary lull in the storm.

The old man had passed on the next day to the great beyond, but the beautiful maiden had remained and was the revered grandmother of the present Rodney White, who, with a maiden aunt, lived in the house whose inmates one by one had been laid to rest in the churchyard until only these two remained. The aunt was as cold and gaunt

as the ice-bound maples that flanked the path from the street to the door. If the sap of the spring was in her heart, it had never been revealed to the motherless boy she had raised, not for love of the boy, but because her stern New England conscience demanded it.

In the hush that followed the passing of the storm the strains of a violin floated out through the open door.

Rodney White was playing Vieuxtemps' "Reverie," and the exquisite harmony of it seemed to come from the inmost soul of the violin vibrant with longing, a-quiver with prayer and pain. The rich, full chords of it trembled far out into the night and across the snow-buried car tracks until they reached the consciousness of a small storm-scourged mite of humanity.

In some subtle, mysterious manner the violin seemed to call direct to the heart of the little wayfarer and set her free from bondage—seemed to calm the storm that had raged within her while she battled against the fury of the wind and snow. It gave her a sense of protection she had never known before in her eleven years of unprotected, unchild-like life. She ceased to feel the stinging cold of the bitter night.

For an instant she stood motionless, her lithe fig-

ure erect, her head slightly bent the better to hear the exquisite melody; then with a sharp intake of breath she nodded her head slightly, as one who catches a distant measure, and with a sob of joy darted toward the square white house. She had reached the path between the maples before the snow began to fall again in large loose flakes that quickly filled her footprints.

An old shawl wrapped around her head caught upon a low limb of a maple tree, and when she had pulled herself free she noticed that the outer door of the house stood slightly ajar and the snow was drifting in.

She stumbled up the steps and across the ridge of snow in the doorway. Once in the hall she hesitated an instant and caught her breath sharply before she slipped into the room whence came the voice of the violin.

Oh, the unutterable joy of it after the hour out in the storm, this being again within sheltering walls! How grateful the subtle sense of protection given by the crackling blaze of the open fire sending its merry, dancing light and warmth into every corner of the room—into the very marrow of her chilled bones! Oh, the ecstasy of the peace that enveloped her—the fragrance of the pine knots on

their leaping bed of fire—the thrill of joy brought by the nearness of a human being and the divine music that had called to her out there in the night!

Rodney White, nervously pacing the room with the soft light from the dancing fire outlining his boyish face with its square chin, looked pale and careworn. His deep gray eyes stared unseeingly over the responsive strings of the violin, and the dark circles around them spoke eloquently of the sleepless nights that had been his. The tense set of his firm mouth told of the battle being waged between body and soul.

Once he ceased playing for an instant, and the little listener in front of the fire caught her breath with a sense of fear—he looked so stern and somber—when a deep, harsh cough racked his body, but again his long nervous fingers caressed the strings and he began to improvise, weaving together themes of Christmas carols with a prayer of infinite longing throbbing through them, with an undercurrent of renunciation that had not been manifest in the “Reverie.”

The little listener knew nothing of the meaning of the music nor the idea it interpreted, yet the emotions of it seized upon her, giving her the feeling

that something sweet and inexplicable had found her and was holding her in a close embrace as a mother holds her child.

Her breath came quick and fast and when the player, with a sigh that was almost a sob, began to play Gounod's "Ave Maria," it seemed as though she must cry out because of the strange mingling of joy and pain that enthralled her—because of the nearness of the spirit that enfolded her in its gentle yet sorrowing embrace—because of the presence of the spirit which believes all things, suffers all things, and triumphs at last through all things.

Then clear and surpassingly sweet came a splendid chord of victory. A superb chord that buried deep all individual grief—a chord that rang with a thrill of hope; and the notes that followed sang with a sweet faith in the infinite and the ultimate triumph of the infinite over the finite world of pain. All the beauty of the world was a part of that matchless melody of divine harmony and, on and on and through it all, rang a throbbing current of individual triumph until with the last sweet note the "peace that passeth understanding" pervaded the room where infinite love had conquered finite pain.

Still with that rapt look on his face, Rodney

White walked across the room to the violin case that lay open on the corner of the square piano.

Reverently and tenderly he wrapped the violin in a silk scarf and laid it in its case and softly snapped the cover down.

In some strange way the watcher felt that she was in some Holy of Holies, that she was witnessing some sacred rite, and a sob of pain and regret burst from her.

Rodney White heard the sob and, turning at the sound, found an odd little figure crouched before the fire.

"Well," he said, kindly. "Where did you come from, little girl, and who are you? I hoped some one would come through my open door to-night," he added, advancing toward her with a welcoming smile.

"I am glad you are not cross because I came in. I—I ran away from Mrs. Pepper's to-night—and—and my name is Joan Worthington," came the answer in an unsteady voice, as the child sprang to her feet.

"Whew! All this way through the snow, little girl. Why, it's a regular blizzard out to-night, and it's a good mile from here to the Pepper place. I don't blame you for running away from her, though," he added, with a whimsical smile. "She's

a vixen if ever there was one. But why did you run away on a night like this?"

"Why!" There was nothing unsteady now in the voice of the pathetic little figure in her very short, very ugly dress of murky brown flannel, with an old black shawl wrapped around her head. Beneath the shawl, hanging down her back, was a thick braid of gold-brown hair. Her face was pinched and colorless but for the dark, arched brows and the blue eyes flashing fire between long heavy lashes.

Rodney White, at that moment, was conscious only of the flashing eyes. The thin white face, and the wistful mouth with its pinched corners, he noticed later when the fire had died out of the great dark eyes.

"Why!" came the voice again, and this time there was a note of pain in it. For a moment the child could not speak for the sob that she bravely choked back.

"Go on," Rodney prompted, gently.

"Yes, I'll go on," she flashed, with a look of faith in her direct, candid eyes. "I don't believe you could be cruel and play that as you do." She nodded toward the violin.

Rodney's somber face brightened with a smile of peculiar sweetness.

"Go on, little snow girl," he urged.

"Mrs. Pepper called me a thief." The low voice was tragic. "She had a five-dollar gold piece. Jim took it," she panted. "I saw him, but Mrs. Pepper accused me. Oh! Oh! she accused me," she wailed.

Suddenly the strange little being ceased sobbing and drew her lithe form erect. "I am not a thief," she said, proudly, with her well-poised head tilted back.

She met Rodney's searching look with a direct, unflinching gaze. On her face was the light of truth and the look in her eyes was not the look of a thief.

"I shall see Mrs. Pepper to-morrow," Rodney said, quietly, his lips firm set. "I know you are not a thief," he added, in answer to the question in the dark, tragic eyes.

With a cry of joy she flung herself down on her knees at his feet, clasped her hands about his knees, and bent her head on them.

"O God in Heaven, I thank you for his faith in me," she cried, with a ringing note of joy in her voice.

In spite of himself, Rodney smiled as he gently raised her to her feet.

"Of course I believe you," he said, softly, "and to-morrow we shall make Mrs. Pepper acknowl-

edge her wrong. She knows me and will not trifle with me when I go with you to see her."

"And you'll go there with me?" Incredulity struggled with joy in the eager voice.

"Yes," Rodney said, with a smile.

"And you are going to let me stay here to-night?"

"Of course. Didn't I leave the outer door open with a prayer that if any one was out in the storm he would enter the open door. And you came, little snow girl, and you shall stay until your people come for you; but why were you at Mrs. Pepper's, if I may ask?"

"I have no people," was the answer, in a dull, hopeless voice from which all the light and life had gone.

For a moment Rodney thought she was about to cry again, but the thin shoulders squared themselves and the flicker of a smile played about the pale lips.

"I am not often so weak-jointed," with an apologetic air. "I'm generally glad just to be alive. It's such an interesting world to live in, and the thought of the good things that might happen makes being an orphan not half bad at times. Of course a woman like Mrs. Pepper is bound to be trying on any one, but it was lots better there than it was at lots of places until this trouble came up that makes

it impossible for me to live there any longer even if she should acknowledge her wrong. I could never, never, live in the house with any one who had called me a thief! Never! Never!"

And Rodney White, looking into the clear, honest depths of her eyes, knew that it would be impossible for such a child to forget such a wrong.

"An asylum is awful," she went on, with a bitter little smile. "If you'd ever been an orphan in an asylum you'd understand how the very thought of going back to it is most harrowing. The asylum is so monotonous—but then life hasn't been all monotony to me. I've been handed about on trial so many times, but every time I'd begin to think I was going to be adopted something would happen and back I'd go to the asylum. Once an old maid—she was a Christian Scientist and taught me several things that make life more bearable—kept me for over six months and had fully decided to adopt me, but when she was about ready a man came along and spoiled it all. She took the man, and back to the asylum went little Joan with a parting injunction to remember 'God is Love and an expression of Love'—meaning I was an expression of Love—'could not be unhappy.'"

"Did you ever go to school?" Rodney asked, hiding his smiling lips with his hand.

"Not a great deal. I went most of the time I stayed with Miss Warren, the old maid, I just told you about. She was good to me in spite of her queerness," she added, reflectively. "And of course I went some while I was doing spasms in the asylum—and I love to read books, especially if they give you a crinkly feeling up and down your back. I haven't read very extensively. Do you love to read?"

Rodney smiled an affirmative at the child. The old shawl had fallen back from the thin face now vivid with animation.

"Sit there in that chair facing me and we'll talk it all out," he suggested, indicating the great arm-chair on the other side of the hearth.

The child sank into the chair with a luxurious sigh.

"My! this is nice. I wonder if it's much nicer in heaven. I never dreamed I'd come to this when I left Mrs. Pepper's. I was madder than a wild-cat then and I just raged and raged and tramped on and on until I heard your music. Oh, how mad I was!" And at the thought of the indignity she had suffered at the hands of Mrs. Pepper—a steely flash came into her eyes and a flare of anger set its signals at the corners of her lips and nostrils.

With his eyes on the pinched little face, lighted

by the dark blue eyes with glints of gold in the iris, Rodney White compared the life of the child with his own life, and a shamed feeling swept over him because he had not met defeat in his life-work more bravely.

"I am an orphan, too," he said at last, very gently, "but I've never lived in an asylum nor been handed around."

"Of course not," Joan broke in eagerly. "Any one with half an eye could see you'd never lived in an asylum—you've been an orphan with a home. I'm the homeless kind, and that makes a vast difference between us. I used to be very rebellious in spite of the fact that I read my Bible diligently, but ever since I lived with Miss Warren I've felt different. Isn't there lots of consolation in that verse about Jesus that reads: 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has not where to lay his head'? I never failed to gain comfort from that until to-night, and only that—only that," she repeated reverently, "could have reached through the howling wilderness of woe in my heart to-night."

Rodney's eyes followed hers to the violin.

"Poor little kid!" he murmured, gently. And then silence came. A silence of understanding between these two widely different specimens of hu-

manity drawn together by the tie of the motherless and fatherless.

Minutes passed.

Rodney gazed vacantly at the fire. Again he heard his friend the noted physician say, "Your only chance is to go to California. You must live out of doors—I know the very place for you—an oasis in the heart of the Colorado Desert—a place where many brave men have fought the great white plague, where some have conquered and some have died, but died fighting—remember that, Rodney. I do not say even Rainbow Springs will cure you. It depends largely on yourself. Take my advice and it will at least prolong your life. God grant that you may get well. But you will at least have fought the fight, whatever the outcome. The violin you must lay away for at least three years—perhaps longer. You must, if you can, forget the triumph that was to have been yours on your contemplated tour. Tell your manager that life is better than fame. Had you followed my advice when you came back from Europe six months ago you would have been much better now. But fight, man, fight, and think victory. I want you to realize your danger but never measure your own grave, Rodney. Leave that for some one else and perhaps there will be no measuring done."

Rodney forgot the little girl in the great arm-chair—forgot everything but the giving up of his beloved violin. He lived again his agony of suffering as he played for the last time for months, perhaps forever, his beloved Amati, the delicate, responsive instrument he loved with all the soul of a man nearly thirty whose heart has never been stirred by love for a woman.

Peace had come to him in the last measures of the "Ave Maria"—a strange, enveloping peace.

Suddenly he thought of the child who had come in as he played—the child who had answered the voice of the violin calling, calling, calling out into the night.

With the thought of her came recollection of the significance of the open door.

Slowly—solemnly came the voice of the clock on the mantel in twelve clear, ringing strokes.

Christmas had dawned once more. Rodney went out into the hall and swept the drifts of snow out of it; then softly closed the outer door. When he came back to the fire his breath was coming painfully short and fast. He looked at the odd little figure in the great arm-chair.

The child was asleep. In the dim light of the fire, that had ceased to crackle merrily, the little face looked even more pinched and pathetic and

cold than it had when she snuggled down in the chair.

"Poor little kid!" he whispered softly. "I'll keep her—I don't care what Aunt Prue says. I'll keep her just the same. She shan't be a 'hand-me-around orphan' any more. I'd be a mighty poor descendant of that other Rodney White if I didn't keep the gift the storm brought on Christmas Eve. And for what other reason is the door always left open on Christmas Eve, I'd like to know?" he demanded, as if arguing with the stern, gaunt woman long since asleep, under her immaculate covers, after a futile and yearly voicement of her contempt of the open outer door "just to get the hall all mussed up and the carpet spoiled."

Rodney had laughed at her this Christmas Eve as he had every Christmas Eve of his life since his father died and left him the trust of keeping the door ajar for the chance wayfarer of the Holy Eve.

His aunt had scornfully accused him of coming from Europe at Christmas tide, each of the six years he had spent abroad, "just to keep up the foolish custom," as she called it, begun so long ago by that other Rodney White to whom had come the beautiful maiden—the maiden who had asked that the outer door be left ajar each Christmas Eve until some one again came to the square white house

out of a stormy night. "Could she have foreseen this night?" he asked himself, with a whimsical little laugh, his eyes on the sleeping child.

"That kid ought to be in bed," he reflected. "But I can't rouse Aunt Prue; she'd frighten the little thing to death before I got a chance to let her know I want her."

He decided at last to rekindle the fire and let the child sleep in the chair.

"Poor little kid!" he repeated, as he knelt on the hearth and stirred the embers until they snapped and glowed and caught eagerly at the pine knots he piled on them. Soon the fire was crackling merrily. The leaping light awoke the child.

The man smiled as the level, sleep-misted eyes looked into his.

"You have had a nice sleep," he announced, cheerfully, "and now I am going to ask you a few questions, then trot you off to bed."

The child smiled at him sleepily.

His dark, somber face brightened with a smile of peculiar sweetness.

"Joan Worthington," he demanded, in a boyishly judicial voice, "would you like to stay with me always? I could adopt you, you know. I am old enough to make it highly proper. We'll do it all up to-morrow, if you say the word. There shall

be no old maid procrastination in our case. Would you like to have me adopt you? Just speak the word, young lady."

"Like to stay!" Joan cried, springing to her feet. "Oh, tell me quick—tell me you are not fooling me—but you couldn't joke when it's so serious to me, could you? Besides you don't look like the fooling kind. Why I haven't belonged to any one since I was two years old. Oh, tell me again that you'll adopt me! I'll try so hard to always be good if you take me. You shall never be sorry that you took pity on a poor little orphan girl. Oh, I'll try so hard to be good and please you every way if you'll take me! It's rather strenuous work for me to be absolutely and perfectly good, although I'm never really ungodly wicked except when I get in a temper like I was to-night," she added, with an apologetic grin.

"Yes, I shall adopt you to-morrow if there is nothing to keep me from it," Rodney White broke in, with a radiant smile. The manifest happiness of the child was good to see.

"Oh, I'm so happy I'll have to cry or burst!" she suddenly exclaimed, and cry she did most gustily. An outburst of the shut-in storm of years.

Finally Rodney laid his hand on her head. "There is no need to cry, little girl."

"No need to cry?" she sobbed. "When the dream of my life has come true—when I am to live with you and that." She pointed a trembling finger toward the violin.

"Yes, little girl, you are to live with me and that, but," his voice broke, "the violin is to be silent for many months."

And while the child sobbed on, but less violently, he told her of the "sword of the consumptive" hanging over his head—of the farewell he had bidden his violin during those last hours with it—the farewell that had spoken to her out in the storm.

When he had finished, she looked at him with eyes soft and gentle as the eyes that looked at him from the miniature of his mother.

"It seems wrong for me to be so happy when you have to give up so much," she said shyly, after a moment's silence.

Rodney had been poking the astonished fire with vicious thrusts with the brass poker, as if the hiss and crackle of the angry sparks appeased him.

He ceased poking the fire and turned to the child with a smile. "Never mind me now, little girl," he said, softly. "I am sure your presence is going to make me very happy. And I hope you will always be as happy as you are now."

"Happy!" she cried, passionately. "Happy—I am so happy that I am thrilling from head to foot with happiness—perfect happiness. And oh, it will be good, good if I can make you happy, too! It will come out all right, I know it will," she said, after a pause during which Rodney studied her intently. "Miss Warren always said 'Divine Love always has met and always will meet every human need.' And oh, it does! It does! Divine Love has met my most human need. I belong to some one at last. Oh, it's good! Good, to have some one to belong to!"

"What a kid it is!" he laughed.

She moved a little from the chair. In the new attitude her profile was cut like a cameo against the sooty background of the fireplace. It was an irregular outline, gaining its greatest charm from the long curling lashes; the sensitive nostrils and curved lips trembling with a happy smile.

Rodney watched her steadily, his eyes sparkling.

Suddenly she whirled to him with a motion not unlike that of the flames sparkling on the hearth.

"Are you perfectly sure you want me?" she challenged.

An almost holy light came into the man's eyes.

"I need you; need you to help me bear the giving up of that—yes, indeed, I want you."

Her eyes followed his to the incased violin.

In the man's eyes was the artistic capacity for intense joy as well as the intense suffering that had set its seal in the lineaments of his strong, artistic face. And there was more joy than pain in his gray eyes now—there was a prophetic forecast of the knowledge that he did need this child as he had never before needed anything.

He looked at her to find her regarding him with puzzled gravity.

“Well?”

“You haven't asked me anything about my parentage.”

Rodney laughed. “A wise man once said, ‘The knowing nothing of one is precisely right. When we know nothing of one we can take it for granted that one is everything we could wish for.’ That is the way I am willing to take you, little girl, if there is no one else who has a better right to you.”

“No one has,” she answered, soberly. “But I'd like to show you my mother's picture,” she added, shyly.

“If you wish, little girl.”

The child turned her back toward him. An instant later she held out to him a miniature framed in pearls. A sweet face was pictured upon the ivory in delicate colors—a face like that of the girl

before him—the face of a girl scarcely out of her teens, with a mass of gold-brown hair piled high on her delicately poised head.

Between heavy, curling lashes the same blue eyes, with glints of gold in them, met his gaze with a direct, wistful look—wistfully sad eyes were those of the miniature girl—eyes with a depth of longing in them that held the man transfixed for an instant.

“Turn it over,” Joan said, softly.

On the back of the locket, engraved in the dull gold, were the words “Joanna from Norman.”

“Norman was my father,” Joan explained. “He disappeared when I was six months old. My mother died when I was two years old. I have their marriage certificate,” she added, with a note of pride in her voice—likewise a challenging note was there, as if she recalled some word of doubt that had in the past been directed at the beautiful mother she so plainly adored.

“I am glad you showed me that,” Rodney said at last, when she had turned again to replace the miniature.

Under his breath he cursed the father who could have deserted the little girl child and the wistful-eyed girl mother.

“Shall I call you Joan or Joanna?” he asked, at last.

The child turned with a happy light in her eyes.

"Call me either one you choose. I like to be called Joan, but oh, I hate to be called *Jone*, as Mrs. Pepper pronounces it! *She* was always called Joan," she added, softly, and Rodney knew that the "*she*" was the girl-mother.

"What shall I call you?" she demanded, in turn. "According to all the books I've read, I'd call you 'Guardy,' but I never liked that, someway."

"Call me Rodney," he suggested, with a smile.

She laughed. "That sounds nice, but hardly proper."

"I like it." He stood up and looked down upon her with a smile.

"We'll get properly adopted and classified by high noon. It's to bed, now. Can you step lightly?"

"As light as a cat," she flashed back.

"Well, I have an aunt, you know, and we wouldn't like to awaken her. She's—well, she's exceedingly nice, you know, and all that, but it isn't just the thing to awaken a maiden lady at this time of the morning, is it?"

Joan smiled understandingly.

"She might not like it," she volunteered.

"Just so; you are a very discerning young lady. So walk easy. Straight up the stairs, then to the

right to the second room. You'll find a bed there you can lose yourself in, and a good sleep is what you need."

He took a candle from the mantel, lighted it, and handed it to her with a kindly "Good-night, or, rather, good-morning, little girl."

With an intense "Good-morning," Joan left the room. Not once did the stairs creak under her careful tread.

Rodney settled himself before the fire and poked it reflectively. "She's stanch and true or I miss my guess—and there's fire in her, too." He smiled whimsically as he recalled the flash in her eyes when she told of Mrs. Pepper's unjust accusation.

Toward dawn the storm swept back from the open country with an added strength and fury. The wild, lashing wind whipped a steady downfall of snow against the windows and tore at the roof of the square white house, but through it all Rodney White slept in his chair before a fitful fire. Slept and dreamed of the maiden who had come out of the storm to that other Rodney White so long ago and of the child who had come to him in answer to the call of his violin—and in his dream his great love for his violin seemed, in a measure, to have been transferred to the child, Joan.

CHAPTER II

IT was almost noon when Joan awoke. For an instant she stared in a bewildered way at the pale wintry sun glimmering in through the windows. Then came an exhilarating thrill of remembrance. It was Christmas Day and, yes, she at last had the promise of a home! And there was a maple tree just outside the window with its ice-shrouded limbs glistening and sparkling under the subtle warmth of the sun.

With a cry of delight, she bounded out of bed and across the floor and dropped on her knees before the window, rejoicing that she had carefully raised the shades, when she crept softly up to bed.

Her luminous eyes danced with delight as she looked out over the glistening world. The fantastic shapes of the icicles hanging from the roof of the house and the limbs of the trees appealed to her fertile imagination, and she fell to weaving a wonderful story of an enchanted ice world ruled by a fairy queen with two magic wands—one of gold to brighten and warm the world by day; the other of silver to shed a mystic glow over the night.

It was characteristic of Joan that until the phantasy was finished in her mind she was conscious of nothing but her delight in it.

As she put on her skimpy dress—she had of necessity slept in her scanty undergarments—she greedily drank in the beauty of the world revealed to her through the window.

On both sides of the house were glistening ice-covered trees. Off across the buried car tracks were low, sloping fields of glittering white. To the left lay the town.

“Oh, I love the whole world!” she cried at last, ecstatically. “The dear mother earth is laughing under her beautiful robe of snow. I know she is—laughing and chuckling over the thought of the little spring flowers held close to her heart.”

Suddenly she realized that she was hungry and downstairs was the man who had promised to adopt her—the man who represented the fulfillment of the dream of her life.

Perhaps he was expecting her that very instant. She trembled with ecstatic excitement at the very thought of it while she combed her heavy brown hair with a huge comb.

She was hilariously happy, as she started down the long narrow stairway—she longed to slide down the banister to give vent to her exuberance, but, re-

membering her determination to be dignity incarnate, descended the long flight of stairs as sedately as would have a Colonial dame.

Her hand was on the door of the room she had spent such memorable moments in, a few hours before, when the sound of voices arrested her.

A woman was speaking, and the words chilled the heart of the little listener with a more deadly cold than had the storm of the night before.

She did not listen in the spirit of an eavesdropper. She could not have moved to save her life.

"Rodney! Surely you are not serious. You cannot intend to adopt a child of whom you know nothing—a perfect scarecrow of a child at that. I saw her with my own eyes on the best feather bed in the house!"

"But I do, Aunt Prudence, I assure you. I intend to take this child and do what I can for her during the next few years—if—if I have a few years." His voice quivered, but the icy hand about Joan's heart relaxed its grip a little, then tightened again as the cold, metallic voice of the woman came again.

"A child about the house will make a great difference, Rodney. And such a child," she added, with a snort of rage, "asleep on the best feather

bed in Poke County with part of her clothing on!"

"Aunt Prudence," Rodney broke in. "I intend to raise that child. Please remember that, and also please remember that the child is sensitive, and until I can get her some more clothing she must not be made to feel there is anything out of the ordinary in her sleeping as she did last night. Poor little girl, she may not even know any better, but she is bright, Aunt Prue! She's a perfect witch of a child."

"That's just it, Rodney White. You are bewitched. I don't doubt that in the least—designing little imp—some one has told her of that fool custom of leaving the door open on Christmas Eve and she's come then just to work on your feelings. No doubt she's a witch, as you call her. Men usually get hoodwinked by the big-eyed kind and all you can talk about is her appealing big eyes—appealing fiddlesticks! She's some nameless brat, mark my words, Rodney White."

The retort on Rodney White's lips was never voiced.

The door burst open and with one bound Joan crossed the room and stood before Prudence White, her eyes blazing with anger, her mouth quivering, and her whole slight figure shaking from head to foot.

The band about her heart had turned from ice into a heat that almost suffocated her.

"You wicked, wicked woman!" she cried, in a choked voice, stamping her foot on the floor.

"How can you calmly call any one a nameless brat when you know absolutely nothing about them? I am not nameless, thank God! I am also well aware of the proper garments to wear at night."

For a moment she continued to face Prudence White unflinchingly, her head tilted back—the spirit of anger incarnate. As suddenly as ceases an April shower the flare of anger left her eyes.

With a pathetic little moan she turned to Rodney.

"Forgive me, forgive me!" she pleaded, her lips quivering. "I am exceedingly sorry I spit out at her, if she's the aunt you mentioned last night. The trouble with me is I never stop to think when I am angry. I should not have listened, either. I did not intend to. I came downstairs with a flood of sunshine and love in my heart and now I'm desolate again. You can't want me after exploding at her that way. Oh, oh, I'm perfectly miserable!" She looked it, as she flung herself down on her knees before the irate woman sitting bolt upright on the extreme edge of her chair.

"Well, I never!" Prudence White gasped, as Joan looked up at her imploringly.

"I am so sorry," Joan said, her voice quivering with emotion. "Honesty compels me to repeat you were unjust to talk the way you did, and a woman of your age must know perfectly well that the Bible says to 'judge not.' At the same time, I had no right to blaze out at you as I did, and I repeat that I am extremely sorry."

"Well, I never!" Prudence White repeated. For the life of her she could not have said more.

Rodney broke the tension of the moments that followed—moments that neither Prudence White nor the child kneeling before her ever forgot.

"Tell her you forgive her, Aunt Prue," his voice had a note of pleading in it.

"Yes, please forgive me," Joan cried, eagerly. "Let's have 'Peace and good will' among us all."

Prudence White moved her lips to say, she knew not what, and the words that she did speak were no more of a surprise to Rodney White than they were to her.

"Get up, child, I forgive you. You are not my kettle of fish to fry, anyway. I've always tried to do my duty by Rodney White, and if he wants you I suppose it's my duty to let him have you, and that settles it as far as I am concerned."

"Oh! Oh! I do thank you and forgive you, too, for saying what you did, although for a moment I hated you."

Prudence smiled grimly. She was not aware that she had asked to be forgiven.

"Oh! Oh! I am so happy again," Joan cried, springing to her feet and, before the astonished woman could prevent it, planted a tremulous kiss on the woman's smooth cheek.

"Well, I never!" Prudence gasped, as she mechanically rubbed the spot touched by the child's lips.

Rodney smiled and drew the child to him. She nestled in his arms with a sigh of content.

Prudence White looked at the man and the child a moment in silence, then said, dryly:

"I don't envy you your charge, Rodney, but if you're satisfied—I reckon I'll have to be. I'll get her something to eat. She looks hungry enough, goodness knows."

Joan's eyes gave one ominous flash; then a gleam of mirth danced in them, as Prudence White stalked majestically from the room.

Any one who knew Prudence White would have been amazed at the quick concession she had made.

She had never pretended to be fond of children and was openly and publicly thankful when Rodney

White, her dead brother's child, outgrew the age of pinafores and dependence.

His mother never lived to see the man-child for whom she had prayed and for whom she had gladly given her life.

Prudence White secretly took a sort of stony pride in her nephew's achievements at school and his growing mastery of the violin from the age of seven until it was now said of him in more than one land, "He is greater than Ysaye."

Although she frankly admitted to herself that she did not in the least understand it, she secretly cherished one of many newspaper clippings, which read in part:

"His notes are always charged with clearness and authority. The thrill of his music runs like an electric chain about his audience.

"His tones are all shades of color and illimitable interpretative resonance, human sympathy, and impulsive and propulsive temperament.

"He is at home in every style of music. He lends majesty to Handel, poetical charm to Viotti, tenderness to Beethoven, grace to Boccherini, soulfulness to Weber, and nobility to Mozart."

Prudence White never let her nephew see her gratification in him, but in the depths of her heart

was an almost unconscious dread of the time when he should bring a wife to his home; for Prudence White, forty-five and a spinster, held old-fashioned notions concerning a woman's sphere, and even the quiet, prim young women of Orion did not quite meet with her approval of what the wife of Rodney White should be.

"Aunt Prue means well, little girl," said Rodney, encouragingly, as the library door was jerked to with a subdued slam.

Joan pressed her cheek against the arm he had about her neck.

"She's made that way, I imagine," she said, slowly. "So many of them are in this town. They get so perpendicular it's a wonder they don't break when they move quick."

The spontaneity of Rodney's laugh brought the blood stinging to the girl's face.

Seeing the hurt light in her eyes he endeavored to check his mirth.

"Did you ever go to a circus, Joan?" he questioned, abruptly.

She smiled, a little reminiscent smile. "I went once, and it exceeded even my wildest anticipations of it. I had to swallow lumps in my throat all the time, I was so thrilled, and when a perfectly gorgeous man took a dive of sixty feet through

space, little cold feelings chased themselves up and down my spine until I got so excited I went over backward. Fortunately for me we were on the fourth row of seats from the ground and I wasn't hurt—except my pride."

Her clear treble merged with Rodney's deeper laugh this time, and the ring of it reached Prudence White in her immaculate kitchen. At the sound of it she clicked her lips tight together and through her set teeth emitted a snort of disdain, even as she dropped three spoonfuls of her famous buckwheat batter on the hot spider.

Prudence White was a conscientious woman, as stern with herself as with her neighbors—and she browned the hot cakes for Joan as carefully as she would have browned them for the President. She and Rodney had breakfasted early in the morning, fully three hours before she knew of Joan's presence in the house.

While Joan was eating breakfast, Rodney left the house on a mission of his own, with a promise to Joan, that after his return they would call on Mrs. Pepper.

"I can forgive even her this morning," Joan had responded happily, then applied herself to Prudence White's justly famous buckwheat cakes.

Prudence watched Joan carefully, and by the end

of the meal was inclined to think well of her. It was not her expressive eyes, and certainly not her quick way of speaking for herself. It was the manner in which she ate and appreciated the cakes.

With Joan's table manners no fault could be found by one even more fastidious than her present critic. Besides that, she ate with appreciative ejaculations interjected between bites, such as, "I never ate anything like these cakes, never! Never! I don't believe the manna fed to the children of Israel could have tasted better."

"You seem rather familiar with the Bible," Prudence remarked, dryly, after the manna outburst.

"I should think I ought to be," Joan flashed back. "I own exactly one Bible and one book of fairy tales. I've read the Bible through from cover to cover exactly six times—the fairy book seventeen times."

"Humph!" said Prudence, sharply, eying the child as if it were a serious shortcoming to have read the Bible through but six times.

Joan realized that she was being looked upon disapprovingly. She sighed. "I suppose I should have read the Bible more times than I have, but it's such a large book compared to the fairy tales—or perhaps you think I should not have read the fairy tales at all. Miss Warren did not approve of them."

"I am not judging you," retorted Prudence, stiffly.

Joan was meekly silent until she had finished her breakfast.

Prudence broke the silence. "I suppose you are not quite a heathen if you have read the Bible so many times—that is if you remember enough of it to do you any good," she added, suspiciously.

"Indeed, I remember more than you think—I know all the 'Sermon on the Mount,' " Joan broke in, eagerly, and promptly and glibly and correctly repeated it. "I know all of 'Job,' too," she added, proudly—"and——"

"Why Job?" Prudence asked, involuntarily, or so it ever afterward seemed to her.

"Well, Job was afflicted, you know, and had his proud spirit humbled and tried, and I've been tried and humbled all my life, and when I'm in the deepest valley of humiliation it comforts me to remember Job, although Miss Warren said I did not understand Job properly. I suppose I don't," she added, ruefully. "But the thought of Job's trials and tribulations has been a staff to my fainting soul many a time in spite of Miss Warren shaking my faith in my own interpretation of it."

"Well, I never!" Prudence ejaculated, weakly.

"Shall I repeat something else?" Joan ques-

tioned, eagerly. "I know most of the 'Gospel of St. John'—all of 'Esther' and 'Ruth' and part of 'Revelation.' Isn't there something splendid about the roll of some of the verses in 'Revelation'? Some of them give me such a creepy feeling up and down my back that I love to say them when I am tired out with the cares of the day, like I always was at night at Mrs. Pepper's. I know a lot of other things, too," she continued, brightly, as she began deftly to clear the table.

Prudence White sat stiffly on the edge of her chair and stared at the odd little being talking so freely about the Bible. It made her quake inwardly because of such seeming irreverence. Prudence White was accustomed when speaking of things Biblical to speak with what she considered proper diffidence.

Joan shocked her, and yet she realized that the child was not lacking in veneration of the words she repeated so easily. Of a sudden she realized that Joan was not quoting the Bible.

"'Man is tributary to God, Spirit, and to nothing else. God's being is infinity, freedom, harmony, and boundless bliss,'" she heard as if in a dream.

"'There is no life, truth, intelligence, nor substance in matter. All is infinite Mind and its infinite manifestation, for God is All in All. Spirit

is Immortal Truth; matter is mortal error. Spirit is the real and eternal; matter the unreal and temporal. Spirit is God and man is His image and likeness; hence man is spiritual and not material,' " Joan quoted as she deftly washed, rinsed, and carefully dried her breakfast dishes and set them on the table.

"What is that?" Prudence demanded, weakly, as Joan hesitated an instant before giving further demonstrations of her mental capacity for memorizing.

"That I just finished?"

Prudence nodded.

"Why, that is the scientific statement of being," Joan explained, cheerfully. "Sounds splendid, don't it? This one is the scientific statement of life. I learned a lot out of the Christian Science book while I was with Miss Warren. I think this sounds fine, 'Life is divine Principle, Mind, Soul, Spirit, without beginning and without end. Eternity, not time'——"

"Stop!" Prudence interrupted, firmly. "Stop right there!" she repeated, as if to give herself some mental support.

Joan stopped so suddenly she choked, and by the time she had emptied a glass of water and was ready to continue Prudence was herself again.

"You've got a long tongue," she said, dryly. "Too long to suit me, but I'm fair enough to admit you seem to know quite a bit, but just remember in the future I don't care to hear any of the things you've been saying unless it is the Bible verses, and I can read them for myself, thank the Lord, so there's no call for you to say any of them to me.

"As for what I heard of the rest of your speaking, it sounds mightily like heresy to me. You may not understand what you're saying and again you may, but you *can* talk less and you must, do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," Joan answered, meekly, all animation gone out of her eyes.

"Now go into the other room until Rodney comes," Prudence added, less sternly.

Joan gladly obeyed.

When the door closed behind the child, Prudence drew a long sigh of relief and clicked her lips together as she began to put the dishes away.

And in the library, Joan, with her thin face pressed against the cold window, looked wistfully out on the maple-bordered path for Rodney White.

CHAPTER III

JUDGE WHEATON lived three doors from Rodney White's, straight down the car line, in a rambling Colonial mansion set well back from the street and surrounded by gigantic silver maple trees that had reared their proud heads skyward for more than a hundred years.

The Judge was unfeignedly delighted to see Rodney.

"Well! Well! It's good to see you. Christmas greetings, my boy," he cried, heartily. With Rodney's hand still grasped in his, he drew the young man into his library, where in the great fireplace, on huge dog irons, a Yuletide log crackled a seasonable lay.

"The Season's best cheer to you, Judge," said Rodney, giving an answering pressure to the strong hand clasping his.

Judge Wheaton was a hale, twinkling-eyed man of sixty—a man who had ever been as a foster father to the dreamy lad whose aunt had never encouraged him to break down the barrier of reserve by

which he was surrounded, a barrier that hedged him in a world of his own, a world to the door of which only two men held the key, and one of them was the man who now sat on the other side of the jovial fire; the other, the famous physician who had decreed the desert for him.

"What is this the doctor writes me about your going to California?" came at last from the man in whose veins flowed the good red blood of perfect health.

"So Stephen wrote you, did he?"

Rodney gave a sigh, drew his chair up with a little jerk, and passed his long fingers slowly through his heavy dark hair. "I thought he would write," he added. "In fact, I suggested that he write you before I returned."

Judge Wheaton's hand shot out to meet Rodney's with a man's grip of silent, sympathetic understanding.

The fire glowed and popped and crackled; the grandfather clock in the corner ticked off the minutes with majestic pomp while Rodney White glided into one of those strange mental experiences where all that happens seems preordained, a mere repetition of the same moment spent in the same manner centuries before.

Even before Judge Wheaton broke the silence,

Rodney knew that his friend was about to speak—knew what he was about to say.

“By treating the subject lightly, lad, the disease will be robbed of half its terrors.”

The sturdy man avoided the wistful eyes of the young man. “And, remember,” he continued, gravely, “with the same kindly persistence that nature uses in healing the bleeding stump of one of her forest giants or covering the uneven and unsightly surfaces of the earth with vegetation, she is ready to give life and strength to the ones who get close enough to her generous, life-renewing heart. When do you go?” he broke off, abruptly.

“Day after to-morrow, Judge.”

“Good boy, that is the spirit! Can I do anything for you before you start?”

“Rather, yes,” Rodney laughed boyishly. “That is one reason why I am here so early this morning. I want you to make a family man of me this very day.”

“What?”

“Just so,” Rodney replied, gravely, enjoying his friend’s astonishment.

“You! You! You cannot mean that you are going to get married?”

“No.” Rodney grew grave again. “Even though I cared for a woman, Judge, the barrier of

my disease stands between me and that—may always stand between me and that. What I do want is your legal aid in adopting a child.”

“Explain yourself,” the Judge commanded, tersely. He listened with varying flashes of amusement and sympathetic understanding flashing across his expressive face as Rodney told of his farewell to his violin, and of the sprite of a child who had come to him the night before.

“And I want to adopt her to-day, Judge,” Rodney concluded, with a wistful note in his voice. “I want to give the little kid the legal proof of a home as a Christmas gift, besides I have often thought I should like to try my hand at bringing up a child,” he added, whimsically. “I will confess that I would much prefer a boy, still this gives me an opportunity to see what I can do in that line—and her gratitude at the very thought of having a home, at last, is about the sweetest thing that has ever come to me. And you know she came out of the storm just as my grandmother did. It almost seems as if my grandmother knew that she would come and had the door left ajar all these years on Christmas Eve for her. I shudder to think what would have become of her if the door had not been open.”

“How does Prudence take it?”

“Like a martyr,” Rodney responded. “She con-

siders it her Christian duty to let me make a fool of myself if I'm determined to, anyway," he added, whimsically. "What do you think about it, Judge?"

Judge Wheaton studied the young man's face intently, as he answered with judicial gravity. "From what you say, my boy, the child must be of the right mettle. If so, I am with you. Anybody is happier by having a child about." A tender light came into the Judge's eyes. His own little granddaughter, Bess, was about the age of this child-waif.

"Yes, and I'll go you one better," he cried, enthusiastically. "I sent to New York for some clothes for Bess, a whole outfit. They are too small for her, though, so I'll add those to my legal services for good measure. Perhaps they will just fit your lassie."

"Good!" Rodney exclaimed. "To quote her, I was in the depths of despair about clothing for her to-day. I'll pay you for them, however. You see," he added, as he met the objection that sprang to his friend's eyes, "you have had a long time in which to enjoy purchasing such things and I want to begin right now."

The Judge smiled assent, thinking how dear the young man was to him—how he had always wished the sensitive lad had been his own son.

"Now, give me the name of the asylum and I'll wire there for corroboration of the child's story, also for information."

"Ask for information in detail at my expense," Rodney broke in, eagerly. "You will be able to get authority from there to make out the adoption papers right away, will you not?"

The Judge nodded a smiling assent, as he rang the call bell on his desk. He foresaw that the little waif might mean life itself for his friend. There was an animated light in the young man's dark eyes that had not been there since this disease began to fasten itself upon him.

The Judge's negro servant, Joe, took the telegram he had written to the matron of Hope Orphan Asylum.

Joe's wife, Mirandy, intercepted Joe in the hall, and Joe's reply to Mirandy's inquisitive desire to know the whys and wherefores of his errand reached the men in the library.

"Go long, nigger," they heard Joe say, disgustingly. Very important was Joe when dealing with women of his own color.

"I'se gwine on de Jedge's business. An' I cain't see why you am always wagglin' dat fool tongue ob yours ober his business for, nohow."

"Good for Joe," Rodney laughed.

"He is the head of his household, all right," the Judge responded, with a musical chuckle, then a flush spread over his fine face. The Judge was not lord and master of his own home.

An hour later the answer came to the Judge's wire, and, woman-like, the matron of the asylum had answered the message in detail with a splendid disregard for the fact that telegrams cost a certain number of cents for each and every word.

Rodney openly exulted as the Judge read aloud:

"JUDGE SAMUEL WHEATON,

"Orion, Vermont.

"*Esteemed Sir*:—

"The child of whom you inquire, Joan Worthington, came accidentally to Hope Asylum when about two years of age. An old Scotchwoman, presumably her nurse, was killed by a runaway horse in front of the refuge door. The child escaped unharmed. She will be twelve years old the first of May, next. In an old hand satchel carried by the woman was found a marriage certificate evidently of the child's parents, as a locket worn by the child had the same given name engraved upon it as was on the back of the marriage certificate with the date of the child's birth. Advertising failed to bring any one to claim the child, so she became a charge

of the asylum, eligible for adoption. Since you vouch for your client, there is no known reason why he should not become her legal guardian.

“ Respectfully,

“ MARTHA KENT,

“ Matron of Hope Orphan Asylum.”

“ I don’t envy you your telegraph toll,” the Judge laughed, when he had finished reading the message.

“ Every word more than pays for itself,” Rodney returned, cheerfully, as the Judge set about getting the papers ready.

“ It’s a good thing she is just a child yet,” the Judge said, meaningly, as he indicated the space on the adoption papers for Rodney’s signature.

Rodney felt a distinct sense of pleasure as he affixed his name to the papers that legally gave him the guardianship of the child of whose very existence he had not known twenty-four hours previous.

“ Mrs. Pepper’s next,” he said, gravely, as he caught sight of Joan’s eager face pressed against the library window as he turned into the maple flanked path.

He waved his hand at the child and smiled happily, as she came flying out at the door, letting it bang cheerfully behind her.

He set the box containing the clothing he had acquired for her from his friend down on the icy path, running like a silver ribbon from the street to the door, and caught the child in his arms, with "Well, young lady, how did you and Aunt Prue manage to get along?"

Joan's expressive face clouded. "I am afraid I talked too much. In fact, I know I did," she answered, truthfully.

"I have something for you in that box." Rodney changed the subject, somewhat surprised at his irritation at his aunt.

"In this box!" Joan cried, flinging herself down on her knees on the frozen path, face alight, eyes glowing. "Oh! Oh! You are too good to me!" Now there was a liquid quiver, like a thrush's note, in her voice, and the man caught himself wondering how any one could be harsh or unkind to such a child. How glad he was that she had come to him—that she belonged to him now!

"Don't! Oh, please don't tell me what is in it!" she cried, interrupting him as he was about to speak. "I never had anything so delightful and mysterious happen, to me before. Oh, I am almost too excited to live! Isn't it an exquisite feeling to have a box right before one's eyes fairly bursting with some wonderful surprise? And not be able

to even imagine what is inside it! Oh! Oh!" She was all a-tremble with excitement.

Rodney smiled boyishly. "How glad I am to have her!" he said to himself.

"I'd take it inside and open it if I were you," he said aloud.

Joan drew a long, quivering breath of delight.

Rodney caught the box up with one hand and held the other out to the child.

"Come on inside; there is another surprise for you."

"Another! I never was so thrilled in all my life."

Safely inside the library, Rodney gravely handed her the adoption papers and turned away while she read them.

"Will you pinch me, please?"

"Pinch you? What for?" he demanded, turning to face the radiant-faced child with just a shade of doubt in her eyes.

"I want to be perfectly sure I am not dreaming. Mrs. Pepper said once I'd go batty some day if I didn't keep my head down out of the clouds more."

Rodney smiled. "You are not dreaming, little girl. *My little girl*," he added, tenderly.

The child flew to him and stood on tiptoe to fling vehement arms about his neck.

"I am almost too happy to live," she sobbed.

"Well, I never!" Prudence White ejaculated.

Neither Rodney nor Joan had heard her enter the room.

"Suppose she told you that I said her tongue was too long," she sniffed at Rodney.

"No, Aunt Prue. She's crying for joy, poor little kid."

"Humph! Funny thing to cry over."

"Didn't—you—ever—cry—for—joy?" Joan spoke each word between long, quivering breaths, while Rodney held her close to him.

"Certainly not," snapped Prudence.

"Well—you've missed—a lot of thrills—if you haven't," Joan quavered.

"I have never hunted thrills," retorted Prudence. "And if you are through crying all over Rodney's fresh-ironed shirt front I'd like to have his attention long enough for him to tell me what clothes he wants to take to California."

Joan sprang away from Rodney, and for an instant her eyes flashed fire.

"Peppery, ain't you?" Prudence snorted.

"Aunt Prue, I want you and Joan to be friends," Rodney said, gravely. "I have just legally adopted her, and I want, if possible, to make her forget the past unkindness of the world toward her."

"Please let us be friends," Joan said, shyly. "I *am* peppery," she added, frankly, "but I am also endowed with intelligence and shall endeavor never to cross you since I am to live with *him*." Her eyes met Rodney's amused glance, a wealth of gratitude in their blue depths.

"Intelligence, pouff!" snorted Prudence. "You may be smart enough, but I doubt if you even know the meaning of intelligence."

"I do," Joan flashed. "According to the dictionary, intelligence means 'a capacity to know or understand.' I looked it up one day when Miss Kent at the asylum told a lady that although I was not pretty I was endowed with intelligence. And after I went to Miss Warren's I learned the Christian Science statement of it: 'Intelligence is omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. It is the Infinite Mind—the triune Principle, or Love, Truth, and '——'"

"Stop!" commanded Prudence, her voice quivering with outraged indignation. "Didn't I tell you never to talk that heresy around me again?" Prudence's eyes flashed threateningly.

"It is not heresy," Joan began, eagerly, "or at least I don't believe it is," she added, honestly. "If heresy is such a terrible thing as one would suppose it to be from your attitude toward it, it sim-

ply can't be heresy. I regret that I do not know the meaning of heresy, but Miss Warren was a very earnest Christian, and she would not believe in anything so very dreadful and she certainly was a firm believer in Christian Science. Of course she did not believe in the devil, as some people do, which seemed very strange to me when I first went there. I had always been told that there was a devil and a hell, too, and I know the Bible speaks of both the devil and hell, but Miss Warren understood the Bible differently from the other people I have known. She says few people understand the Bible properly and——"

"Will you stop her?" Prudence turned on Rodney, and her voice trembled with rage.

Rodney turned away to hide his twitching lips.

"Suppose you take your surprise upstairs to your room, Joan, and see if you can make use of it."

"I've done the wrong thing again," Joan cried, with a crestfallen air. "I am about as much at home with *her* as a coon is at church, but I'll try to please her for your sake. If she does not care to hear about Miss Warren and her belief I shall try exceedingly hard to remember never to mention them in her presence," she said, pathetically.

When the child had gone, Prudence gave Rod-

ney a clear and concise report of Joan's conversation earlier in the day.

"She certainly is an interesting little thing," Rodney said, trying to conceal his mirth. "And I am more than glad she came to me last night," he added, gravely.

Prudence sniffed. "Well, all I've got to say is, you've got your hands full. I am sure I never in all my life saw nor heard anything equal her."

Rodney smiled, and Prudence, with an irritating sense of having wasted words and breath, launched out into a discussion of the things to pack for the California trip, which to her was an almost ungodly act of foolishness. She intended to accompany her nephew from an acknowledged sense of duty and from an unacknowledged desire to see more of the world than had been revealed to her by the journeys she had taken, all within a radius of a hundred miles from Orion.

Still, most clearly did she make Rodney feel that her sympathies did not go out readily to him because of an affliction she did not understand and in the seriousness of which she did not believe.

Upstairs, Joan turned the box over and over and looked at every side and then untied the string very slowly, meanwhile imagining and imagining what would be inside.

Joan was never one to slur the luxurious pleasures of anticipation.

But at last she threw off the cover. Everything inside was wrapped in tissue paper, so that looking at each article was a distinct and separate pleasure.

First there was a soft brown beaver hat, turned up on the left side with a dashing green quill thrust through a gold buckle—a band of crushed green ribbon was around the crown. A thing of joy was that hat to Joan.

Then there was a long, brown fur coat. A soft brown serge sailor suit, brown stockings, brown shoes, and red-brown kid gloves, and other things too numerous to mention.

It was a glowing, sparkling Joan that appeared before her guardian half an hour later and even Prudence White, while she sniffed at Rodney's extravagant foolishness, as she called it, had to admit that the child looked nice.

When Rodney and Joan started toward Mrs. Pepper's, Prudence admonished Joan to remember that to be vain was to be ungodly. And some way Joan's meek, "Yes, ma'am," disappointed her, although she would not have admitted even to herself that she expected more than that very proper response.

As they drove along, Rodney guided the slow

black horse abstractedly, while he pondered over the unchildlike life Joan had had. For Rodney White was shrewd, even though he was a dreamy musician, and he knew Mrs. Pepper and knew that Joan's experience of drudgery with her was only a repetition of the drudgery that had been her portion with other shrewish women.

No wonder the child was so delighted with the realization of the long-looked-for home.

"Poor little kid!" he sighed, as he looked at the rapt little figure beside him.

As for Joan, she gave herself up to silent rapture over the beauties of the day and her own inner joy.

"I don't care how cross Mrs. Pepper is!" she cried, as they drew near that worthy woman's small cottage.

"I am too happy and too grateful for anything she says to hurt me—after she acknowledges I am not a thief," she added, passionately. "She must do that."

"She shall," Rodney said, gravely, and the light in his eyes boded no good for Mrs. Pepper if she did not acknowledge her wrong very speedily.

Mrs. Pepper did not at first recognize Joan, but when she had grasped the important fact of Joan's good fortune she readily admitted that her son, Jim,

had confessed taking the money soon after Joan's abrupt departure the night before.

But the woman demurred when Joan asked for her modest grip, which, as she had naïvely told Rodney, held all that she owned in the world, namely, one Bible, one book of fairy tales, a few skimpy clothes, and the precious marriage certificate.

"Kindly get my ward's belongings or let her get them," Rodney demanded, tensely.

"But I really ought to have damages for her leaving me in the lurch like this," the woman whined. "The baby is cross and the twins are croupy and I'll have to worry along alone until I can get another girl to help me."

Rodney contemptuously held out a bill with a brief, "Get those things in a hurry, if you please."

The sharp-faced woman took the bill greedily.

"Now, sign this," Rodney demanded, when Joan announced that she again possessed her worldly belongings intact.

The woman signed the paper Judge Wheaton had prepared, at the instigation of Rodney, and the paper legally bound Mrs. Pepper to her confession that Joan was innocent of her unjust accusation against her.

When Joan started upstairs to bed that night her face was a glow of delight.

"You've given me everything—everything that I have been hungry for all my life!" she cried, happily, as she bade Rodney good-night. "And I am simply thrilling with delicious excitement over the very thought that I shall see California with my own eyes—California, the land of my fondest dreams," she added, ecstatically.

And Rodney White, looking at the elfin little figure, fancied he could see the thrill that ran through her frame, from her new shoes up, up to the new brown hair ribbon perched jauntily on the top of her gold-brown hair. And more than that, he felt forcibly that the soul back of those luminous eyes had depths and measures he could never fathom.

So the rapidly flying shuttle of life snapped the old thread, and with new threads—his and the child's—began weaving a new pattern on the tapestry of time.

And thus it happened that Joan, fully satisfied in body and soul and with a great love for all the world, even Mrs. Pepper, went blissfully to sleep during the same hour she had spent battling against the fury of the wind and snow the night before.

And the peaceful Christmas moon, treading its predestined way across the star-studded sky, laid silver lines of light over the little town—the lines of light on the square white house lingering caressingly—a full measure, well held, because of its perfect note in the anthem of life.

CHAPTER IV

OF all oases on the great Colorado Desert, Rainbow Springs is the most interesting and the most delightful.

It has from time immemorial been like a garden of Eden to the Indians who gave it its name. It was a delightful oasis long before the coming of the white men who added to its natural beauty.

There are hot springs there, and springs, the cold, pure sparkling water of which cannot be surpassed in all the world. The Indians claim that the hot springs are medicinal waters, given by a great spirit to the chosen ones of their race at the beginning of the world. And they tell a legend to the effect that in the days of the ancient rulers for many suns and many moons seven rainbows hung in the sky above the springs. Rainbows by day and rainbows by night. Radiant half-circles of colored light intense against the splendor of the sky by day. Pale-hued on the moonlit background of pale, phosphorescent light. Seven symbols expressing the love of the Sun and Moon gods for their Earth-born children.

Some of the older Indians claim to have seen the mystic rainbows fade away, to the mysterious realm of the great beyond where dwell the spirits, and this on the third hour after the coming of the white men.

And even to this day, when a rainbow hangs in the sky over the springs, the Indians reach their hands skyward in worship of the Sign of the Sun and Moon gods while they chant prayers to the Great Spirit. They end their prayers with a moon dance and great feasting and a certain sacred rite which no white man has ever witnessed.

That the nearest railroad station is fully seven miles from Rainbow Springs seems fitting to those to whom the oasis is like the great true heart of a mother with vast outstretched mountain arms keeping guard over the fertile little kingdom ensconced in their sheltering embrace.

But to Prudence White, made irascible by the long, unaccustomed overland journey, the little station, where the train stopped in the early winter dusk, seemed little short of an added insult to her already outraged nerves.

The Indian who chanced to be driving the buggy that was to convey them across the expanse of desert between the station and Rainbow Springs was, to her overwrought mind, a painted warrior

of the race she feared and hated with all the intensity of her stern New England nature.

She did not see the beauty of the mystic desert moon, riding high in the zenith, spreading its bars of light across the sage and greasewood-dotted sand and the half-revealed, half-hidden mountains in the distance.

The serene desert stars had no charm for her. But to Rodney and Joan the majesty of the desert spoke, enthralling them by its mystery and that haunting sense of the unknown that is felt in the vast silence and solitude of a desert night. The mystic light of the moon touched Joan's upturned face, etherealizing it. Even the stinging discomfort of the biting wind sweeping over them in uncontrolled fury was not felt by her, but Prudence White, on the back seat of the buggy with Rodney, felt it; covered her head with a shawl and gave herself up to bitter reflection.

Not once was the silence of the ride broken until the lapping of the water running in the irrigating ditches, through the Indian village, could be heard, and the barking of the Indian dogs broke the solemn stillness of the moonlit night.

"What do you think of it, Joan?" Rodney asked the next morning as they stood, in the early dawn,

on the steps of the snug cottage he had secured, just across from the Indian village.

To the left of them lay the desert expanse dotted with greasewood and cacti, and with scanty grasses scarce hiding its anatomy.

Beyond lay the shifting sand-hills with their glistening grains piled high, wave upon wave, from the face of the desert to the ridges that seemed to meet the sky.

To the right towered the gigantic San Jacinto mountains, and nearer were the low ridges, the outstretched arms about the little oasis.

The man and the girl faced the mountains. On one of the splintered peaks of the mountain range, half-hidden in a mystic purple veil, the skyward-shooting flames of the morning sun revealed a grim rock head, like the stern visage of some bygone Indian chief—athwart the pearly gray sky.

Joan did not answer Rodney's question until the illusion faded away, and when she spoke her voice was quivering.

"I love it! Love it!" she cried, passionately, as she slipped her hand in his. "No one but God could have done it."

"No, little girl."

Then they both stood spellbound, hand in hand, for it was given them to see two mirages on that

never-forgotten day. The illusion of the sculptured head of the old Indian chief was followed by that of an ancient city with a thousand spires piercing the sky. A city on the edge of a vast sea with white-capped breakers rolling in upon the shore. A moment passed, and a mighty ship rose out of the sea and anchored just without the city walls—and back of the city on the crest of a low hill were the crumbling turret walls and broken towers of a castle.

Slowly the second mirage faded from the sky and the quaint Indian village, across the way, lay bathed in the full light of the sun now high above the mountain peaks.

The Indian dogs, silent until now, began clamoring for their morning meal, while out of the Indian huts tumbled a horde of half-clad copper-hued children followed more sedately by their elders.

The Indian village was awake and the awakening of the American portion of the village followed, until finally all the place was astir with activity.

The tinkling of bells added to the general medley of the morning and from the southern portion of the little village came an odd caravan.

An old man was in the lead. He was garbed in corduroy trousers and a gray flannel shirt open at the neck. On his head was a broad-brimmed

felt hat with a rattlesnake band. Reddish-brown shoes completed the outfit. His eyes were mild and blue, and his finely chiseled patriarchal face was framed by a mass of long silvery hair.

Close behind the old man were two pack-burdened burros, with the nose of the one sporting the bells thrust against the old man's shoulder. Behind the burros were three beautiful collies, a mother and two half-grown frolicsome pups. At least, one of them was gamboling about its master—the other limped decidedly.

"Good-morning, stranger," the old man called, in cheery greeting.

"Good-morning," Rodney responded, cordially. To him the old man seemed a fitting picture against the background of the desert vastness—a note in harmony with the general scheme of things.

As for Joan, she was instantly down on her knees beside the injured pup. It had limped to her as its master spoke and thrust its moist little nose into her hand.

"I see you are on neutral ground," the old man said.

"How so?"

"You certainly are a stranger here!" The old man chuckled. "I'd even go so far as to wager

that you have not been here twenty-four hours." He spat reflectively on the sandy road.

"You are correct. I arrived here last evening; but why do you say that I am on neutral ground?"

The old man removed his broad hat, baring his white head to whatever stray breeze might deign to come, for the morning was already growing warm with that peculiar desert warmth that follows close upon the heels of the dawn.

He passed his long fingers through the shining silver strands upon his brow. The air felt good to him. He gave a sigh, threw his shoulders back, and again spat upon the sandy road, deftly and reflectively. Then his mild blue eyes met Rodney's.

As Rodney watched him, he was at first amused, then in some subtle way he felt strangely sorry for the old man. His face showed so plainly the marks of some mental strain through which he had passed and which had, now that he observed him more closely, left a mark of vagueness in the mild blue eyes.

"Fine day, stranger." The old man at last replaced his hat and moved as if to start on.

Rodney laid a detaining hand on the old man's shoulder. "I am much interested in your statement that I am on neutral ground," he said, in a

certain boyishly winning manner that seemed peculiarly his own.

"Forget it, lad, forget it." The old man wagged his head sadly. "They'll tell you that Dad Sherwood is cracked," he said, pitifully. His lips quivered and the mist of tears in the mild eyes made a queer lump rise in Rodney's throat.

The old man read the look of sympathy aright, and like a flash he held his head stiffly and the light of a mystic shone for an instant in his eyes. His face was stern now, yet transfigured and illumined with an inner light. The stern look vanished almost as quickly as it came, leaving his face beautifully gentle. He looked at Rodney with a tender smile.

"The 'Man of Sorrows' will help you bear it, lad; He helps me bear my affliction." He tapped Rodney on his chest with his long, tapering fingers. "Bear the disease in the highest way, lad. My golden days are past, taken from me by the same disease; but meet everything bravely—meet everything bravely, lad. I'll be going now," he added, with his gentle smile.

"Prospecting?" Rodney felt a strange longing to listen to the musical voice of the old man.

"Yes, going out to my mine. Sometimes I find it—sometimes it seems to have vanished. That is

why they say I am cracked. Mebby I am, mebby I am. I've had much sorrow, lad."

"I hope you find your mine this time, Mr. Sherwood."

"Call me Dad, lad—call me Dad. I prefer it, my son. I think I shall find the mine this time, but I never can tell. Peculiar mine, son, most peculiar." His eyes followed Rodney's to the burdened burros.

He tapped the load on the lead-burro with his cane. "There is plenty of bacon there for two, son. If you could come along I would share the mine with you, if I find it again. I like you, lad, and the little girl over there takes me back to one of my own." He sighed and his eyes filled.

Joan was now sitting on the lower step of the porch, one arm about the collie's neck, her free hand stroking the lame foot.

"Has a heap of sense, hasn't he?" The old man nodded at the collie, responding to Joan's caresses; his rough red tongue kissing the hand under his long, pointed, sensitive nose.

Rodney smiled his appreciation of the picture. It had not taken him long to discover the difference Joan was going to make in his life.

"Burros have sense, too," the old man continued, after Rodney had properly introduced himself and his ward.

"I started out without my water canteens once—those are full"—the old man indicated, with his staff, the lead-burro's load of water canteens—"went two days without missing the water—that was one of the times I seemed to forget everything. Perhaps I am queer at times." He sighed wistfully. "When I did remember," he continued, with a little reminiscent smile, "we were in the grasp of a sand storm that soon brushed the cobwebs from my mind. A sand-storm is more terrible than an Eastern blizzard, lad. And this was the stinging, biting kind of a sand-storm that beats against every exposed portion of one's anatomy more viciously than a fury of Eastern hail.

"When the storm was over, I found myself on the edge of the village here, near my own little cabin—they call me a hermit, lad, because I do not mingle with them any more than I can help, but you and the child shall always be welcome there, my lad; but to finish my story," he went on, after Rodney's low-voiced thanks, "the burro had brought me home, either because of an almost human sagacity that understood my condition mentally, or because of its keen scent for water."

He passed his hand across his forehead and, by the changed light in his eyes, Rodney knew that

he had already forgotten the tale of the burro's intelligence.

"The desert is the place for reflection, lad. You have left the world of action, let the desert speak to your very soul. Listen to its weird solitude, its great silence. Oh, how I love the grim desolation of it all! I love it! I love it! It is God's land, my son—His very presence is ever here." His eyes brightened and he held out both arms as if to embrace the sweeping sands in the distance.

"It is a sublime symphony—a land of divine music. The master musician has set it apart for a Mecca of strength to those who can catch the measure of its majestic chords of splintered peaks, sanded valleys, and hot skies. It has dawns of many colors and each color a measure of sweetest music. It has mystic nights when the moon and stars hanging low touch the sands into a song of primal forces—an adagio of love and might and death—an allegro of hope and peace and life. There is a charm in the spell the desert throws over one, my lad, because it deals with the Infinite. And from sun to sun the desert is ever true. It never gives a false note back to the Infinite. It is true—true and sincere, lad. Sometimes the melody it plays is calm and serene like some 'Reverie' played by a master musician on some rare old vio-

lin; then again it's like the wild pulsating throbs of some gigantic pipe organ, played by some Titan musician, with all the stops open and the loud pedal on, in a wild defiant battle song. But every note rings true, lad, every note rings true. I hope I haven't talked too much," he exclaimed, suddenly. "I'll be going now."

"Not until I thank you for your description of the desert," Rodney cried, grasping the old man's hand and shaking it appreciatively.

"Aye, lad, it will speak to you as it has spoken to me. Good-by for a time, son. I must be on my way. Stay on neutral ground if possible, lad."

Rodney checked an impulse to ask him to explain what he meant by his reference to neutral ground and the old man's silver voice flowed on. "I think I'll leave the chap with the little girl, if she wants him. He's a fine laddie, but I'll be glad to give him to her. That sprained foot of his would pain him, most likely, out there where we are going. And then look at them, lad, they love each other already. Come, Queen—come, Prince," he called. "Stay there, Don," he added, as the pup with Joan started to come, reluctantly.

"Joan!" Rodney called. "This gentleman, he wishes us to call him 'Dad,' is going to give that collie to you."

Joan flew toward the old man, and the pup, his yellow coat shining like spun gold in the sunlight, dashed along beside her, his injured foot, for the moment, forgotten.

"Do you really mean that I am to have this beauty for my very own?" Joan demanded, her face aglow.

"Yes, little girl," the old man said, gently, laying a hand as light as thistle-down on her head.

In a flash, Joan was on her knees beside the collie, her arms around its neck. "Oh, you beauty, you darling!" she cooed. "You are to be mine, mine! Oh, I am so happy!"

The old man smiled. "A beautiful sight to remember when alone with the stars," he said, gently.

"Oh, how can I ever thank you enough?" Joan sprang to her feet, manners suddenly remembered.

"You have more than thanked me already," he answered, with a beautiful smile.

"Oh, but I should like to do something to show my appreciation of the beauty. Why, he is the very first live thing I ever owned in all my life, and the dear Lord knows how I have prayed for some living thing of my very own to love. I didn't pray for this beauty, though, for that would have been coveting your neighbor's goods, but I could not help longing for one like him, and Miss Warren said:

‘Desire is prayer,’ so perhaps after all he is in answer to such a prayer. I’d like to think so, because it is such a beautiful thing to have a prayer answered, isn’t it?”

The old man raised her chin with the tips of his long fingers. “You are a sweet spirit come to Rainbow Springs to bring peace to the hearts of many,” he said, with the light of prophecy in his eyes.

He turned after a time to Rodney and held out his hand. “Good-morning, lad. I hope to find you much improved when I return. You will find health here, lad.” To Joan he said, gently: “The memory of you will go with me like the perfume of some beautiful flower. Take Don now, and if there is any cause for gratitude in your heart, pray for Dad Sherwood and be kind to Mona when you start to school.”

In a few minutes the old man with his burros and dogs became merged into a distant speck dancing up and down on the desert. Rodney stood watching the vibrating speck with a dreamy light in his eyes until he heard a heavy step on the sand beside him.



"YOU ARE A SWEET SPIRIT COME TO RAINBOW SPRINGS TO BRING
PEACE TO THE HEARTS OF MANY."—Page 82.

CHAPTER V

“GOOD-MORNING, I am Major Phillips, at your service, suh!” There was a distinct Southern tang in the voice of the corpulent gentleman of military appearance, who greeted Rodney with an outstretched smooth white hand.

“You are Rodney White, I believe, suh.” The Major eyed the young man approvingly, as he stroked his goatee. The goatee and the military mustache of the Major’s immediately attracted one’s attention because of their contrast to his hair and bushy eyebrows, which were white, while the mustache and goatee were of raven blackness.

“I am Rodney White, and very much delighted to meet you, Major,” Rodney responded, genially. “This is my ward, Joan Worthington,” he added, his hand resting for a moment on Joan’s shoulder.

The Major looked his surprise as he greeted Joan.

“Jim Allison did not mention a ward when he wrote me that you had engaged his cottage. I am sure the child will make no difference to Allison,

though," he added, hastily. "Fine man is Allison and there is nothing like this air for growing children, still it's strange Allison did not mention her to me," and his bushy eyebrows were raised inquiringly.

"Ah, didn't I mention her to Mr. Allison?" Rodney's voice suggested polite surprise at his omission. He did not care to enlighten the Major to the fact that he did not even dream of Joan's existence when he engaged the cottage. He had decided not to tell any one of his recent adoption of Joan lest it prove embarrassing to the sensitive child. He had prevailed upon his aunt, much to Joan's delight, to allow the child to call her Aunt Prudence.

He smiled whimsically as he recalled his aunt's martyr-like air as she gave her consent to become an aunt by adoption.

"You have a maiden aunt with you, have you not?" the imperturbable Major continued. "I could have cared for you at 'The Sign of the Rainbow,' " he added, reproachfully. "I have quite a few guests, and it's a comfortable place, suh." He waved a pudgy hand in the direction of a rambling green building which, sprawled as it was over the Major's grounds, occupied fully half of the little oasis. "'The Sign of the Rainbow,' " the Major said, pompously. "Even though you are not my

permanent guest—I hope you will feel free to come over at any time, suh,” he added, hospitably.

“But I want to caution you, suh.” He stepped close to Rodney and took hold of the lapel of his coat.

“There is a serpent in our Eden, suh. As difficult as it may seem to the newcomer to this beautiful spot where we dwell in peace with our red brothers, the serpent is also in our midst. Up there,” he continued, nodding toward the north of the village. Rodney’s eyes followed the Major’s until they rested on a few small unpainted cottages and a low roomy building, also guiltless of paint, flanked on the left by a square building painted a dull drab, which later proved to be the government schoolhouse, and on the right by a small red brick church.

“The serpent lives in that largest building,” the Major said, as Rodney turned to him inquiringly, after a lingering survey of the building.

“The serpent is Sam Welch, suh, and I advise you as a friend and a gentleman to have nothing to do with him, suh.”

Rodney began to understand the old prospector’s reference to his being on neutral ground.

“Sam Welch is a regular dog in the manger, suh. A blot on the fair escutcheon of this beautiful

flower of the desert, suh." He swept his arms majestically in the direction of "The Sign of the Rainbow."

Suddenly the Major noticed the collie pup romping in the sandy road, with Joan. Across the road, a horde of dusky Indian children watched the dog and the white child.

"Dad Sherwood's prize collie, by all that's holy!" he exclaimed. "Where is dad?" he added. "I thought I saw him drifting out with his outfit as I came up."

"Mr. Sherwood gave the pup to my ward," Rodney answered, somewhat stiffly. He was glad now that his aunt had insisted on accompanying him to the Springs. He would not like to have Joan under the constant espionage of the Major. To Rodney, it seemed a profanation of something holy to call an inhabitant of this beautiful place "a dog and a serpent."

"Whewee!" The Major whistled through his teeth. "Why, Dad fairly worships those dogs. What made him do it?" he added, shrewdly.

"I am sure I do not know," Rodney answered, curtly. The reserve in his manner was apparent even to the Major and he stiffened perceptibly.

"No harm intended, suh. It is rather strange, though, that Dad should deliberately give away one

of his dogs. Off here," he added, tapping his forehead. "A most pathetic case of mental aberration. Too bad! Too bad! He was once a most brilliant and successful pastor of a large church in Memphis." The Major wagged his head solemnly. The Major ever loved to hear the sound of his own voice. "Came here with two daughters, beautiful girls, suh, believe me. They both died the same week, suh. The old preacher has been queer ever since, suh. He makes long trips across the desert from time to time. Sometimes he comes back with his pockets bulging with gold nuggets. At others he comes back half-starved and without a sign of gold. Says he can find his mine at times, at others he can find no trace of it. And even the Indians have never been able to trace him to the mine." Rodney caught the gleam of avarice in the Major's eyes and at that instant read him aright.

"He spoke of some one by the name of Mona," Rodney advanced.

"Ah!" The Major gave a little deprecatory cough. "Dad must have taken a fancy to you, suh. Mona is one of his hobbies. There she is now," he added, pointing to the Indian children across the road. "The tall one there with the gray eyes."

"Why, she is not an Indian!" Rodney cried. "I understood there were no white children here."

"Half-breed," the Major answered, succinctly.

Some two years older than Joan was the little half-breed. Tall and slender and accurately proportioned, with features so perfectly symmetrical that a sculptor might have chiseled them. Her olive-tinted skin was of a clear, velvety texture, her forehead broad and intelligent, and her hair fell back from a natural center parting in rippling copper-tinted waves. There was truly little likeness to the Indian in the child, her eyes were large and luminous and as gray as Rodney's.

As the men watched her a slow smile crept over her face, accentuating her perfect beauty. The slow smile was followed by a soft wistful look in the great eyes, which seemed in its way to enhance her physical charm as much as had the slow smile.

"Jove! She is a regular beauty," Rodney exclaimed, with true artistic appreciation of the beautiful. "Tell me about her, please."

The Major chuckled. "Her father was a white man who came here too late to be fully restored to health. Her mother was a fly-up-the-creek of an Indian squaw with wonderful black eyes and so beautifully formed that it is no wonder the poor chap went wild over her. They were married, Indian fashion, a boy came first and Mona followed about three years later, just about the time the

poor chap died. The squaw died soon afterward."

"Who cares for the child?" Rodney asked. The story had stirred him and he caught the wistful light in the little half-breed's eyes—a light that had escaped the eyes of the unsensitive man.

"Old Cecilia, the grandmother," the Major answered, in a tone that indicated that he was about to end the subject.

"But the brother, you spoke of a brother?"

"The brother is a devil," the Major snapped. "He is a reincarnation of his great-grandfather, Fighting Wolf, the Indian Chief who was responsible for every outrage committed upon the white settlers in the early days. Children were never more unlike. She is almost white every way—he is all Indian. Mona attends school and speaks fairly decent English, while Chawa, the brother, runs wild all the time. The few days his uncle, the chief, has compelled him to attend school have been days of trouble from beginning to end."

"I want Joan to attend school, if possible." Rodney's voice was tender as he watched Joan cross the road to the group of Indian children circled around the little half-breed. Rodney could almost see the ever-changing light in the child's eyes.

"Fine school here, suh." The Major's voice,

now pompous, brought Rodney's eyes back from Joan and the half-breed child, Mona, who had left the Indian children and was now beside Joan talking to her eagerly.

Rodney wished that he could have watched the two children longer, but said heartily: "That is good, Major. What kind of a teacher have you now?"

"Lois Reeves is in charge now. A fine girl," said the Major, impressively. "A most splendid young woman, suh. Slightly afflicted bronchially, but a splendid young woman, suh. Mona worships her and the Indian children are better controlled now than ever before. There is only one fault to find with her." He tapped his finger-tips together impressively. "She will stay up there in a shack belonging to that viper." He spat contemptuously on the ground.

Rodney smiled in spite of himself. The Major's beady eyes snapped malevolently at the very thought of his enemy.

"Rodney! Rodney! Breakfast is ready," came the thin voice of Prudence White from the doorway of their cottage.

Rodney turned. "My aunt, Miss White, Major."

"Delighted! I assure you, I appreciate the honor

of bidding such a charming lady welcome to the Springs." The Major bent low over the hand Prudence offered him somewhat reluctantly.

She turned from the Major in evident relief. "Rodney," she snapped, "call Joan; you may be willing to allow her to associate with those half-clad savages, but I am not. Call her immediately, Rodney," her voice grew shrill. Joan and Mona, followed by the half-clad Indian children, were crossing the open space between the road and the first Indian hut.

"Joan will come for you, Aunt Prue," Rodney said, with a smile.

"Joan! Joan!" Prudence almost shrieked in her shrill excitement.

Joan turned back reluctantly after a word or two of explanation to Mona.

When Joan reached the little group on the porch, Prudence was fanning her hot face with her apron. "You can march right into the house and stay there," Prudence commanded, stridently. "I never was so upset in my whole life. Isn't the dreadful heat of this place on a winter day, when it ought by every law of nature to be cold, enough to distract a civilized mortal without your worrying them by consorting with those terrible Indians? We shall all be killed in our beds, I know we will. It

will serve us right, too, for being in such a place," she snorted, as she turned to enter the house.

Joan followed after her in apparent meekness, but Rodney had caught the flare of angry rebellion in her eyes, and sighed as the collie followed her before he could prevent it.

"Come in to breakfast, Major," said Rodney, trying to cover his aunt's retreat with a degree of cordiality he was far from feeling.

The Major accepted the invitation with alacrity.

"I believe I will, suh. Your aunt is most interesting, suh, most interesting."

On the very threshold of the door they beat a hasty retreat.

"Take that beast out of here!" they heard the strident voice of Prudence.

"Oh, Aunt Prue, please let the pup alone," Rodney pleaded, as the gaunt, irate woman came through the house prodding a surprised pup with the bushy part of the broom.

Joan followed, a defiant little figure, her eyes blazing, her lips set rigidly.

"I'll not have a dog in the house, Rodney White," Prudence snapped. "I've had my feelings upset enough since I left Orion without having a miserable dog added to my troubles."

Out in the small yard, its sandy surface broken

by a few palms and some orange trees, Joan knelt with her arms around Don's neck and her face was set and determined.

"Come in this house immediately, Joan," Prudence commanded, but her voice was less harsh.

"I'll come in when Don can," Joan returned, spiritedly.

The Major chuckled.

Rodney turned away to hide his twitching lips.

"Come inside this instant, Joan." There was a cold metallic ring in the voice of Prudence.

Joan stroked Don's head in studied indifference.

"Joan, please come in for me; we will give Don his breakfast together before we eat ours," Rodney said, softly.

At the sound of Rodney's voice, the set, defiant look left Joan's face and the angry flare of light vanished from her eyes. Her lips moved, and three astonished people heard her say slowly, solemnly, "'God is Love,' Don, and 'God is All. We are expressions of love,' Don, and 'expressions of Love cannot hold angry thoughts in their hearts.'" She hugged Don close to her and whispered something in his ear, and the pup wagged his tail in sympathetic understanding.

"Remember that 'God is Love,' Don," she repeated, aloud. "And everything will come out all

right, because Love rights everything. Aunt Prudence may love you well enough some day to let you come into her house and it is not right for me to refuse to obey Rodney, so I'll have to retract my words spoken in unrighteous anger and obey." She pressed a rapturous kiss on Don's silky head and bounded toward the house.

"I am extremely sorry to have refused to obey you promptly, Aunt Prudence," Joan said, sincerely, as she reached the side of Prudence. "You must stay on the porch, Don," she commanded, as Don started to follow her into the house. "Good boy," she approved, as Don lay down beside the door and rested his nose meditatively on his fore paws.

"Holy Mother of Cork!" gasped the Major, as he entered the cottage with Rodney.

Rodney smiled but said nothing.

Prudence White, despite her mental disturbance, had prepared breakfast with her usual culinary skill.

"I understand your not coming to 'The Sign of the Rainbow.'" The Major addressed Rodney, as he held his seventh hot biscuit in the air and buttered it with epicurean skill.

"Miss White," he turned to Prudence, "I have not eaten such biscuits since I ate those made by

my old black mammy, in Virginia. Even my deeply lamented wife, who left me desolate and alone in the world, save for a graceless nephew, could not make bread like this. You have achieved here a biscuit that would make an angel long to leave the pleasures of Paradise for the space of time necessary to thoroughly enjoy such a triumph of culinary art." He eyed the buttered biscuit with the air of a connoisseur.

Rodney looked from the Major to his aunt and was surprised to find that which he had never seen before on her colorless, almost masculine face with the scant tresses strained tightly back from her forehead.

"Could it be?" he asked himself. Yes, without doubt there was a tinge of red, that might safely be termed a blush, on that stern face and a contortion, that might safely be called a smile, jerked at the corners of her thin lips.

"I've cooked enough to know how to make eatable bread," Prudence jerked out, with an evident effort.

"I would that I were in your shoes, young man." The Major, with rare tact, looked away from Prudence, as he helped himself to another of the delicately browned biscuits.

Rodney's face was beginning to express his sub-

conscious annoyance. In some unexplainable manner the loquacious Major rasped his nerves.

Joan ate her breakfast absently.

Prudence, struggling to regain her wonted composure, noticed Joan's inattention to her food.

"You are not eating anything," she said, sharply eying Joan as if she were committing some serious crime.

Joan sighed.

"I can't eat. Can you eat when your spirit is in one place and your body in another?"

"I have never been in that condition," Prudence snapped, glad to vent her embarrassment on Joan.

The Major calmly helped himself to another biscuit and looked at Joan, a twinkle in his beady eyes.

"You are a disciple of Brahma, I suppose?"

Joan's eyes flashed, but she made no response. She did not like the Major. Therefore did not enjoy being ridiculed by him.

Prudence came to the Major's rescue, as a red flare of anger spread itself over his puffy face.

"Answer the Major, Joan, or leave the table," Prudence snapped.

Rodney started to speak but the flash of steel in his aunt's eyes warned him to silence.

None of them were prepared for the child's next move.

"Thank you, Aunt Prudence," Joan said, gravely, as she left the table. She turned to Rodney and favored him with an expressive wink. Prudence gasped. She had a baffling sense of a punishment gone astray.

At the door, Joan paused. "I am not a disciple of Brahma," she said, with her head on one side. "In fact, I do not believe in any non-Christian religion. I believe in the Lord of Hosts, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and——"

"That will do, Joan," Prudence snapped. "You'll be giving us some of your heresy next. Please remember that I have repeatedly told you I do not care to hear your views on religion."

"Very well, Aunt Prudence. I just wanted him to understand." Joan nodded toward the Major. Before Prudence could further voice her wrath, Joan was gone. An instant later came her joyous, "Come on, Don," and Rodney knew, as well as if he could see her, the little half-breed would join Joan in front of the cottage.

"Is she like that all the time?" the Major asked, his eyes still flashing angrily. The Major could not bear to be worsted in a matter of wits—in fact, opposition of any kind always riled the Major, and the Major was an unforgiving man.

"Like that, only worse," Prudence sniffed.

"I've been more unsettled since we've had her than I ever was before in all my life."

"How long has she been with you?" The Major scented a mystery, as he recalled the omission of any mention of Joan in Rodney's letter to Alison.

"Only——" Prudence began.

"For some time, Major," Rodney interrupted his aunt, with a glance she understood.

She scowled and lapsed into a sulky silence.

"Ah, just so," the Major returned, a velvety note in his voice. Later he would see the woman alone and unearth the mystery, if there was a mystery as he supposed. At any rate he would, in some way, get even with the child for getting the better of him.

"She seems to know something of religion." He addressed Prudence now, and his voice was soft and bland.

"She has read the Bible through about a dozen times," Prudence returned, dryly.

The Major raised his eyebrows in astonishment, as he carefully buttered another biscuit. Nothing impaired the Major's appetite. That the biscuit was the last on the table and no one had properly breakfasted but himself the major did not realize, or if he did he calmly ignored the fact. The Major

was enjoying his breakfast. He had what he called a "beast of a cook" at "The Sign of the Rainbow."

Prudence, with a look of defiance at Rodney, gave an account of Joan's ability to quote the Bible and heresy, as she termed Christian Science.

The Major laughed uproariously, but Rodney's eyes flashed more than once, for Rodney had, during the few days Joan had been with him, learned to love the child with a greater love than he had ever been able to give his aunt.

The Major lingered at the little cottage until high noon, and Prudence White, for the first time in her life, left the breakfast dishes unwashed while she listened to the Major's tongue, which was undeniably long and much given to intonations of praise of himself.

Meantime, Joan and Mona, with the collie pup at their heels, left the village, bound for the favorite playground of the little half-breed. Their way led them past the burying ground of the Indians where, Mona told Joan, her white father and dusky mother were buried.

Joan's eyes filled with tears as she looked at the graves marked by rude wooden crosses manifesting the influence of the Franciscans and the teachings of their Church upon the Indians.

Joan slipped her hand in Mona's. "I don't even

know where my little mother is buried, but, Mona, I just love to imagine that like Elijah, she went straight to heaven in a chariot of fire when she left me. Don't you love to imagine things, Mona?"

Mona's eyes had in them a wonderful soft look as she gazed down on Joan's upturned, radiant face.

"What is it—this to imagine?" she asked, in a puzzled way. The slow smile, that Rodney had admired, crept over her face.

"Imaginations are thoughts, Mona. Mine are often wild and extravagant, according to Miss Warren. Imagination is just thinking anything you wish, whether it is so or not, Mona," she added, patiently, as the puzzled look still lingered in Mona's expressive eyes.

"Ye-es, imag-i-nation is what I call dreaming, eh?" Mona gave a triumphant glance into Joan's face, as Joan squeezed her hand with an ecstatic, low-toned, "Yes."

Joan had found a much-longed-for kindred spirit in Mona and was, as usual when delighted, quivering with the intensity of her pleasure.

"You are a dear, Mona," she cried, impulsively, "and I love you."

Mona searched Joan's face with inscrutable, serious eyes and as she met the wealth of affection and

sincerity in Joan's candid gaze, her slow smile again appeared.

Then there was silence for some time, as they left the village behind them and began the ascent of the trail that led up the low mountain to Rainbow Ridge. The old Indian trail is steep and at times so narrow that the dense sagebrush flanking the trail makes the path difficult of ascent. About half a mile up the trail, two palms rise majestically out of the rocky soil beside the path, and tower sentinel-like, one at each side of the steep trail.

At the base of the twin palms Mona stopped and motioned for Joan to be seated on a flat rock beside the path.

Like some dusky young goddess, she stood and gazed down on the little village bathed in the warmth and light of the morning sun.

Don, limping again, threw himself down at Joan's feet and licked his sprained foot with an injured air.

"Poor old baby." Joan gathered him up in her arms and cooed over him, while he licked her hand with delight.

"I am sorry I forgot your sore foot, Don boy," she cried, penitently. "So many things have happened this morning to fill me with joy that I am so a-thrill with happiness that you would pardon me

if you could just imagine how full of joy I am."

Mona turned and looked at Joan with that wonderful soft light again in her dark eyes.

"Down there, you said you loved me," she said, softly.

"Indeed I do love you!" Joan cried, sincerely.

A dreamy light came into Mona's eyes and her voice was as the voice of a mystic as she spoke, "The spirit of my white father answered you then with love for love—I spoke not then for the spirit of my mother is also within me and her spirit is the spirit of the race that does not give or take in haste. But here, where my brothers, the palms, guard the trail to the land where first was seen the seven rainbows—the gifts of the Sun and Moon gods to her Earth-born children—here, where gathers the dust blown by the four winds, I, Mona the half-breed, pledge you my love for all eternity. May my spirit enter the body of a wolf if that love ever fails." She stood there, exalted, beautiful, with her hands raised high above her head.

"Oh, Mona! Mona! how beautiful," Joan cried, springing to her feet and bestowing an ardent kiss on Mona's red lips.

"Pledge first thy lasting love," Mona said, with a stern note in her liquid voice.

"I pledge you by the four winds," obeyed the rapt Joan. She was thoroughly reveling in Mona's somewhat tragic declaration of eternal friendship. It appealed to the dramatic instinct in her.

"And—and may my spirit enter the body of a swine if my love ever fails," she canted, solemnly. She was secretly proud of substituting "swine" for "wolf," because of her sudden remembrance of the casting of the devils into the swine by the Saviour.

Mona remembered and abode by that morning's vow of eternal friendship, although it almost cost her own life. No less faithful to the vow was Joan, but she was never tried and tested as was Mona.

"Let us go on," Mona said at last, and again they climbed the narrow path until they came to a large cave, its entrance half-hidden by a flat mass of overhanging rock. Here in the ancient days many Indians had dwelt, for the cave extends many feet back into the mountain-side and in it there are remnants of those bygone days in the shape of mortars hewn out of solid rock wherein the Indians once pounded their acorns and dates and mesquite beans. Here also are ollas of that same half-forgotten period. The ollas Mona kept filled with water from a neighboring spring.

"My house of dreaming," Mona announced,

proudly, as she and Joan stood in the semi-darkness of the cave.

"And you share it with me?" Joan whispered, in an awed little voice.

"With you, my friend, yes," Mona answered, proudly.

"Oh, Mona! Mona! truly the Lord has dealt kindly with me," Joan returned, fervently.

"What do you call it?" she asked, after a silence in which Mona enjoyed to the fullest her friend's admiration of the place that had ever been to her a sacred retreat from the strife and disappointment that was often her portion in the Indian village.

"I call it the Cave of Rest," Mona answered, softly.

"Oh, let us rename it in honor of the day—let us call it the Enchanted Chamber of Peace," Joan cried, eagerly.

"It shall be as my friend wishes," Mona returned, with a trace of sadness in her voice.

Joan caught the wistful note and turned and embraced her friend in her usual impulsive manner.

"I believe after all the Cave of Rest is the only name for it," she whispered, enthusiastically.

She was more than repaid for the concession by the grateful light that dawned in Mona's eyes.

They sat down at last with arms about each

other, on a flat rock covered with a blanket Mona had brought there months before.

Don stretched himself out at their feet and barked and whined fitfully as he slept and dreamed of some prehistoric days when, in another life, he fought and killed some savage wolf.

Mona was a dreamer of dreams, but Joan opened up a new world to her that day in the Cave of Rest—a fairy world of mystic lore.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Joan went to her room that night, Prudence followed her.

Rodney noted the proceeding with a sigh. It had not pleased him to have his aunt so absorbed by the Major as she had been. That night at supper a few sharp words had passed between him and his aunt because of the latter's lecturing Joan about playing with Mona.

Rodney was perfectly willing that Joan should associate with the little half-breed, and had decided the discussion in favor of the two children being allowed to play together.

He liked the appearance of the little half-breed and then he had made inquiries about her and all the villagers spoke well of the girl. And wasn't she a protégée of the old minister's? That was certainly in the child's favor with Rodney. The old man appealed to Rodney, and more than once, during the hours Joan was with Mona, he had pictured the aged minister out on the desert with his burros and dogs. Under all his interest in the old man, with his burden of sorrow, there was an underly-

ing sense of uneasiness about him which Rodney could not explain to himself. He tried to shake off the feeling, but it clung to him not only that day but during all the days that followed until he again saw the old minister.

That afternoon Rodney had met Sam Welch, the Major's object of hate, and found in him a man more to his liking than was the voluble Major.

Sam Welch was an attenuated, sallow-faced man with iron-gray hair and a hollow, mournful voice. He suggested melancholy personified, yet Rodney liked the man. That Welch was bitter toward the Major was evident, though he did not vilify his enemy. But in a quiet, sorrowful manner, he informed Rodney that there was bad blood between him and the Major, because he, Welch, had been appointed postmaster of the Springs, thereby ousting the Major, who until the coming of Welch had run the village as it suited him.

Welch had lived at the Springs five years. He had come there with a maiden sister and an invalid wife—the wife had passed away shortly after his arrival. He had broken all his ties to the outer world and since his sister was content to remain there with him, he had taken a sort of mournful pride in staying where his wife had died.

He invested his small capital in a few acres of

land on the north side of the village, and on this piece of ground he had erected a few shacks and the roomy building in which he lived with his sister. The shacks he rented at a modest price, forming another thorn in the flesh of the grasping Major, who, until the coming of Welch had obtained exorbitant prices for room and board at "The Sign of the Rainbow."

Martha Welch boarded some of the renters of Welch's shacks, and more and more were Welch and his sister gaining in popularity and number of paying guests.

The Major railed, and threatened even the government if Welch were not removed from his official position as postmaster and he reinstated, but he railed and threatened to no avail. Welch remained, and the Major hurled invectives at him and his sister and all those who lived on his ground, until Lois Reeves arrived.

The Major was privately casting his eyes about for another helpmeet and Lois Reeves had met with his unbounded approval for that very desirable position, until the coming of Prudence White with her art in cooking.

All day the Major had debated between youthful beauty and middle-aged culinary skill. He ended the day's argument in the favor of Prudence, for

the taste of her bread was still with him, besides a shrewd New England woman like her would mean money for him. And money was the Major's god.

With Prudence in his kitchen there would no longer be a ceaseless string of unsatisfactory cooks worrying him and depleting his coffers. That either Prudence or Lois would refuse him if put to the test he did not question for an instant. The Major never underrated himself.

All day his hatred of Joan had grown. The mole-hill of ruffled vanity was now a mountain of vindictive detestation.

Ignorant of the fact that Judge Wheaton, Rodney's own particular friend, was Justice of the Peace of Orion, the Major had, before he retired that night, written a letter, addressing it to Orion's Justice of the Peace. He had learned, by clever pumping of Prudence, that Joan had been adopted by Rodney on Christmas day, that he had not known of the child's existence twenty-four hours before he adopted her, and that Prudence herself knew nothing of the child's life before she came to them except her declaration of heresy, to quote Prudence, which she had learned at a certain Miss Warren's.

The Major's letter won a grunt of disgust from Judge Wheaton, and the Judge immediately inclosed it in one of his own to Rodney. In turn he

wrote a letter to the Major, scathing him for his unmanly conduct and assuring him that in Joan's life there was nothing but good and that there was no taint in her parentage.

All this added to the Major's hatred of Joan until in time the man became obsessed with his desire in some manner to vent his spite on her or Rodney.

But to return to Joan and Prudence that second night at Rainbow Springs.

"Joan, I wish to talk to you about your conduct to-day," Prudence began, stiffly, when alone with Joan.

"You mean, I suppose, my going off with Mona," Joan returned, spiritedly. "I thought we thrashed all that out at the supper table to-night." Joan was in an irritable mood. It had wounded her sensitive spirit to be obliged to imprison Don in the woodshed. She resented Prudence's harsh presence at the very time she wanted to be alone with her grief over leaving the pup alone.

Prudence's cold eyes glittered, but she remembered Rodney's decision in regard to that subject, and snapped crossly, "It's about another matter."

"Another!" Joan sighed.

"Yes, another. Rodney is a perfect lunatic over you, and as far as he is concerned I shall have nothing more to say. Later on I shall sympathize with

him for the trouble he is bringing upon himself, but just now I am going to let you both absolutely alone, except when something concerns me or my friends." Prudence almost blushed. That day she had taken her first peep into the land of romance. Never before had the gate to that enchanted land ever been even approached by the opposite sex and the Major had leaned far over the magic gate, and it was only natural that his words of admiration and scarce-veiled advances of something more tender had gone to her head like wine.

Joan's eyes flashed at the reference Prudence made to future trouble brought on Rodney by her, but she bit her lip and forced back the angry tears that rushed to her eyes at the very thought of bringing trouble to the man she idolized.

"Please explain the other cause of your anger toward me," she said, with a manner as stiff as Prudence's own. Her head was tiptilted in the way Rodney had grown to love, but her face was drawn with a look that would have hurt him.

She seemed suddenly old and worn, unchildlike. The continuous excitement of the day had been almost too much for her high-strung nerves.

"I refer to the Major," Prudence began, severely.

Joan threw herself on her bed and shook with a mixture of laughter and tears.

"Joan, what are you doing?" Prudence demanded, sharply.

"I—I think I am laughing," Joan responded, raising herself up on her elbow and looking at Prudence through a maze of tears. "I am so relieved," she continued, blithely. "I thought perhaps I had unconsciously done something dreadfully wrong. You see, I am not cut the same way of the cloth that you are and it's hard to fit us together, but I assure you, you have lifted a weight from the very depths of my soul."

"Humph!" Prudence snorted: "When I was your age nothing would have been more dreadful than having been impolite to a guest. I should have been severely and very justly whipped had I acted the way you did—and to such a man as the Major," she added, with a flush spreading over her thin features. Prudence had actually blushed a number of times that day.

Joan sprang from the bed and faced Prudence with a rapt look in her eyes.

"Would it relieve you any to whip me?" she demanded, her head thrown back, her gleaming eyes meeting the cold ones of Prudence with a direct, unflinching gaze.

"If it would, I assure you, I am perfectly willing for you to whip me. I have been whipped be-

fore, and I assure you that I prefer a whipping to any tongue-lashing that ever was conjured up. So whip me, if you wish, and then let us forget the whole matter. I believe in chastisement and then forgiveness. The Bible says: 'Spare the rod and spoil the child,' and I do not want to be spoiled, so whip away if you want to, but please do it quickly. Slowness in anything always gets on my nerves. Miss Warren told me never to acknowledge I had nerves, but at school I was compelled to admit them and declare before a room full of scholars that the human body was simply alive with them. It is so hard to know just what to believe in this world," she added, reflectively.

"Are you through?" Prudence demanded.

"Yes, if you wish it so," Joan answered, meekly, suddenly remembering that Prudence was always objecting to her talking too much.

"I suppose I have talked too much again," she said, contritely.

"You've talked plenty." Prudence was recovering her usual composure.

"Well, I am sincerely glad that it's no worse."

"Humph!" Prudence snorted, as she started to leave the room. "And as for whipping you," she added, with an evident effort, "much as you need it at times, I shall never lay hands on you. You

are Rodney's affair, not mine, thank goodness, but please treat the Major with proper courtesy next time he comes." The door banged and Prudence was gone.

"Dear Lord, I thank Thee that I am Rodney's affair, not hers," Joan murmured, reverently, as she began to undress for bed.

Rodney smiled when he heard the door slam. He had heard that same subdued slam of exasperation a number of times since Joan came into his life.

He loved Joan with a tender, protective love, and the love he gave his aunt, while sincere, was the manner of love one ever accords a stern, unyielding relative.

The Major called again early the next morning and again ate and praised Prudence's great skill in cooking.

"Joan, I am going for the mail. Do you want to come with me?" Rodney said, quietly, as they left the breakfast table.

"You will excuse me, will you not, Major?" he inquired, politely. "I also wish to send out some letters in the early mail," he added. He was glad he really had some letters prepared for the early mail, even while he acknowledged to himself that he would have made some excuse to quit the Ma-

for's company even if the mentioned letters were a myth.

The Major excused himself pompously. "Would go with you, my boy, if I didn't always rest half an hour after eating. I shall enjoy the company of your estimable aunt while you are gone, if I may have the honor."

It is needless to say he was accorded the honor, by Prudence.

"We are not pining for the Major's company, are we, little girl?" Rodney asked, smiling at the child dancing along beside him, with Don at her heels barking and capering exuberantly. The collie had mourned for his mother and brother and the good old man, his master, during all the long hours of the night, when his lame foot pained him, but this morning the pain was entirely gone and he transferred his faithful alliance to Joan—an alliance from which he never wavered.

Joan immediately liked Sam Welch. His mournful manner appealed to her fertile imagination. And the placid Martha Welch won her heart with a motherly hug. Joan always responded to the demonstrations of affection from those she loved as a flower responds to the caresses of the sun and rain.

"We had a very sick man over here last night,"

Welch announced to Rodney, in his solemn way, as he sorted the morning mail.

"Where is he?" Joan demanded, eagerly. "Oh, could I do something for him?"

Rodney smiled at her. "Go see him, kiddie, if you wish. If you can brighten him up as you do me, you will do more for him than medicine could."

Martha Welch pointed out the sick man's cottage to the eager child and Joan was off like a flash.

Suddenly she darted back. "I forgot to ask his name," she explained, in answer to the quizzical look of amusement in Rodney's eyes.

"William Arth," Sam Welch explained, with an admiring look at the animated child.

"Oh, what a charming name!" Joan cried. "William Arth—William Arth, William Arth, you cannot be sick with that name," she chanted, as she bounded again toward the unpainted shack where lived the sick man.

A thrill of excitement ran through her, as she knocked on the front door of the little two-room shack. There was something very fascinating to her in this calling, like a grown person, on some one sick.

The man's ungracious "Come in," brought her

back to earth with a little shock such as one feels when cold water is dashed in one's face.

William Arth was a morose man of saturnine appearance. He lay propped up in bed, on very much soiled pillows, and scowled moodily at Joan, when she entered the room.

"Good-morning," she said, in such evident cheerfulness that the sullen look in a manner left the man's pain-drawn face.

"Shall I bring my dog in, or shall I come in alone?" Joan asked, with her hand on the door. "Perhaps I had better come in alone, it will be less for you to get used to," she added, as the man did not answer. "Stay out, Don," she commanded the collie. She smiled gratefully when Don showed his disappointment by a low whine, as he obediently stretched himself out in front of the shack.

"I am sure I shall be enough for this time." Joan advanced, with a winning smile, toward Arth's bed. "Besides, if Don were in here, I might not do all I intend to do for you, with your permission, and I am sure you will give that," she went on, blithely, serenely unconscious of the man's sullen silence.

"I have had quite a little experience with sickness during my checkered career," she said, brightly. "I am not exactly certain of what a checkered career is," she added, honestly, "but I read of one

once in a perfectly adorable book—the hero was the one who had had a checkered career and he was perfectly charming, and ever since then I have called my career checkered, because it sounds so fascinating and my life certainly has been unusual.”

That the child herself was unusual Arth admitted to himself, as Joan deftly straightened the front room, washed the dishes, and put to order the kitchen, finally finishing her cleaning by thoroughly sweeping the two rooms with a dampened broom, after she had opened both doors and the windows and covered Arth’s face with a thin quilt, to keep the dust from him.

“Now, you will feel better with something clean to rest your eyes on,” she said cheerily, as she removed the quilt.

“Now, I shall begin on you.” She smiled at Arth with a light in her eyes that he had seen in the eyes of his mother, checking the refusal to allow her to begin on him that trembled on his thin, colorless lips.

So Joan, unconscious that the man was in some vague way resentful of her ministrations to his comfort, chattered blithely of her enjoyment of Rainbow Springs, of the Cave of Rest and Mona and the dog Don, and of the wonderful Rodney who had brought her to the Springs. She finished

with a whimsical allusion to Prudence and the Major.

"I hate that fat old popinjay," Arth snarled, when she mentioned the Major.

"I hated him yesterday," Joan said, honestly. "He seems just like a big fat toad to me, and yet I know he is God's child and we are commanded not to hate and this morning I am so full of love for the whole world that I can tolerate the Major."

The ghost of a smile played about Arth's mouth. But the smile was followed by a scowl as Joan deftly slipped the pillows from under his head. She gave them a brisk shaking and returned them in clean, fresh slips she found in the dresser drawer.

She finished the indignity by asking Arth if he could get up while she put clean sheets on the bed. "Those sheets are dreadful," she said, frankly, "but you are a man and sick at that, so don't feel bad about it. You should have a woman to take care of you, every man should," she added, with an air of great wisdom that became her well. "A man is so helpless when it comes to the things that belong to the sphere of woman."

Arth smiled in spite of himself. And when the child had gone into the other room so he could dress, he struggled into his clothing with an effort, for the man was sicker than the child knew.

Joan whacked and patted and straightened the bed with great pride; then went back to the kitchen to prepare a light breakfast for the sick man, while Arth went gratefully if somewhat sullenly, to his fresh, clean bed.

He ate the breakfast Joan brought him, with evident relish, while she perched on his trunk at the foot of his bed, chattering like a magpie.

Much to his own surprise Arth was enjoying himself. As is the case with most invalids, he liked talkative people about him when they were willing to do all the talking themselves without expecting him to exert himself likewise. Besides, this was a novel specimen of the genus feminine—a witch of vivacity and vitality. Moreover, to his unbounded surprise he found himself longing to tell this child, that which no one in Rainbow Springs knew, although he had been there for more than half a year.

William Arth when quite young had married an emotional girl, with an artistic temperament which he did not in the least understand. He had always commanded and never explained. He considered the implicit affection of his wife a legal duty, a sort of commercial article that he had purchased rather than something fine to be kept by watchful tenderness.

Within three years things had come to a climax. And on occasion of his absence one day, his wife had taken her departure, leaving behind a curt little note to the effect that as he did not care for her any more she did not care to live longer under the same roof with him. The humiliation of it was more than he could endure, besides, in his way, he loved his wife, but he made no effort at reconciliation and resigned his position and went to New York, where his present disease fastened itself upon him. He had never heard directly from his wife, but he knew that her brother had died shortly after her desertion of him, and left her a fortune.

His wife lived in the same town as his only sister, who, while not a newsmonger, kept him informed about his wife, and from her he learned that his wife had become a marked social success.

All this Arth unaccountably longed to tell Joan. When he could no longer work he had come to Rainbow Springs and hedged himself, by his inflexible will, within a barrier of reserve. This had been gradually accepted by the people in the village, who had at first made friendly advances to him, until this coming of Joan marked the advent of the first visitor he had had for over four months.

The night before he had had a hemorrhage at the post-office, and in his usual manner had refused

the kindly offer of Welch and his sister to bring him home. He forgot the chattering child after a time, forgot even the food he was eating, which was the first for nearly six months that had not been prepared in an indifferent manner by himself.

Joan noted the far-off look in his eyes.

"Would you rather I did not talk?" she asked, as she removed the breakfast tray.

"Keep on," he growled. "I don't mind your talk."

"Oh, I am so glad!" Joan cried. "I think you and I are going to get along fine together. It is such a relief to find some one willing to be talked to. Rodney likes to hear me talk, he assures me that he does, but Aunt Prudence is always stopping me when I get strung off on Christian Science, and all I know, to talk about, is a heap of the Bible and some statements of Christian Science I learned when at Miss Warren's, but Aunt Prudence—she is not really my aunt, as I explained before—calls the Science statements heresy. Heresy must be something dreadful by the way she acts about it, so I shall keep those things to myself or at least try to until I can learn the definition of heresy. I haven't asked Rodney the meaning of it, because we have been alone so very little that I have not even finished my expressions of gratitude to him

for letting me belong to him." Since Prudence had told the Major of Joan's recent adoption, and Prudence had conscientiously told Rodney of her telling, Rodney had decided that it would be best to let every one else know of it also.

With a patience that surprised him, William Arth explained the meaning of the word "heresy," and each word he uttered added to the glow of delight in Joan's expressive eyes.

"I am so delighted!" she cried, as he finished. "Don't it give one a delicious thrill to find that the one we like best of two people is correct? I knew Miss Warren would not believe in anything bad even if she might believe in the unusual and sectarian. But Aunt Prudence is so set in her ways, she is just like a rod of iron. She seems to be perfectly unbendable, and a stiff-necked person is to be pitied, don't you think so?"

Arth nodded. To himself, he admitted that a stiff-necked person was to be more than pitied. For William Arth longed for his wife and fireside joys of his own, and knew that his own stubborn will had banished them from him forever.

"You might try some of your Christian Science talk on me," he suggested at last, with a smile jerking at his lips.

Joan smiled delightedly and began. She repeated

all she knew of the science, then added the last two chapters of "Revelation," "for good measure," as she expressed it. "I might tell you some of my imaginations some day," she said, shyly, after Arth had whole-heartedly thanked her for her efforts. "I have a whole stack of fairy tales stored up in my mind and I've always longed to tell them to some one with a mature mind. I, of course, told them to the Pepper children, and while they were perfectly fascinated by them, they were not overly bright, so I could never make up my mind whether the tales I told them had any merit in them or whether anything else would have kept those kids amused just as well as they did. I have read very few books except the Bible, Christian Science, and the fairy book I own." She sighed.

"It has been my fate to live with two old maids, and I assure you that I hope it will not be my portion of sorrow to die an old maid like Miss Blake did. Miss Blake was not like Miss Warren in the least. She seldom read the Bible and would never allow me to quote it to her. She had me read to her, though, for three or four hours each day.

"Some of the books were horrid, all lally-gagging, but some of them kept me so thrilled that I could not sleep nights, but would keep my head covered and shiver and shake and expect a ghost to

appear at the foot of my bed every minute, although I'd strengthen my fainting soul with all the Bible promises of protection that I could remember; but it was very difficult to remember any of them when the last thing I had been allowed to read that day was something harrowing. Still, I like thrilling books," she added, reflectively. "There was one book in particular, a book called 'She,' which I have always longed to finish. It was so thrilling. I was about half through it when Miss Blake was taken with her last illness. Of course I could not finish the book to her and it's been my fate never to be able to get hold of that book since then. It sends nice prickly feelings all over me, though, just to think about it, and I cannot help being sorry Miss Blake will never know how it ended. She was so fascinated by the first chapters of it. Of course I shall know how it ended some day, if I live long enough, but think how tragic it must be to die without knowing how such a book ends."

Arth roared with laughter. Welch and Rodney, coming toward the shack for Joan, heard that spontaneous laugh.

"By gum!" Welch exclaimed. "That man has not even smiled before, since he came here."

Arth could have told them that he had not laughed before in more than four years.

He greeted the two men cordially. Rodney took his fancy as Joan had taken it.

After that morning, much to Prudence's disgust, Joan spent an hour or more each day cheering the sick man and putting his house to rights.

When feeling fit, Rodney went with her, and after Lois Reeves came back from her Christmas vacation, she and Martha Welch would sometimes spend the evening on Arth's porch, while Joan, with Mona beside her and Don at her feet, chattered to the delight of them all. To Rodney and Arth, between whom a sincere friendship had sprung up, these evenings were especially delightful.

Meantime there took place that winter an unusual courtship. Welch made Prudence a melancholy offering of love, as he understood it. The Major, with desire for a good cook and a frugal hand at the helm of his household affairs, courted Prudence with words of flattery and honied speeches.

For Lois Reeves, Joan immediately conceived an affection that bordered upon idolatry and she could hardly contain herself the two days that elapsed between the return of the school teacher and the first day of school, even though she and Mona, accompanied by the collie, made many trips to the Cave of Rest.

CHAPTER VII

RODNEY saw Joan start off that first day of school, with a smile of rare sweetness, but with secret misgivings in his heart. Joan was such an odd child. He knew that she loved Mona devotedly, but how would she get along with the horde of Indian children from whom she shrank, if they came near?

With Rodney, as well as Joan, Mona seemed set apart, different from the full-blooded Indian children. Hers was a strange nature—a mixture of gentleness and fire. She might have been the offspring of an innocent woodland doe and a flame spirit, but the full-blooded Indian children were the ordinary half-barbaric offspring of a half-civilized race.

But things went better that day than Rodney even hoped for. As far as he could learn Joan's behavior had been exemplary. She came home in high spirits.

"I think I am going to like school here better than I ever liked it any place," she cried, joyfully,

as she flung her arms around Rodney's neck, on her return from the afternoon session.

Rodney drew her to him happily. He had regretted all day that his ill health made it necessary for Joan to attend an Indian school. Yet he instinctively knew that she would not be worsted by contact with any kind of people. Her spirit would triumph over any environment, and she would rise true and with a flower-like purity out of any association.

"I hope you behaved with some degree of propriety," Prudence interrupted Joan, in the midst of a vivid account of some of the actions of the smaller Indian children. Mona chanced to be the oldest scholar in school when Chawa, her brother, did not attend. Her young cousins, Flying Eagle, aged seven, and Marina, aged six, had come to school that noon-day in such scanty attire that Miss Reeves had been compelled to send them home for more conventional raiment.

Joan finished her broken narrative, but with a visible decrease of pleasure in it.

"Yes, ma'am; I was extremely good." She turned to Prudence. "Our seat is right by the window this way, and I can look straight up the road here, and see Rodney when he takes a turn in the yard."

"Humph! You had better be studying than eying Rodney. I should think you would be mortified almost to death at having to sit with an Indian. Rodney should speak to the teacher and have your seat changed," Prudence sniffed.

"I assure you that I am sitting with Mona by my own request," Joan returned, with a stiffness that matched Prudence's own. "Mona is not an Indian, either. She is only half Indian, and she had a most magnificent white father. She showed me his picture to-day, and while the picture is a very poor piece of photographic skill, it portrays a very handsome and romantic-looking man. I adore Mona, too. She has an imagination, and besides that she is extremely kind to me, and please remember, Aunt Prudence, she is the very first bosom friend I ever had, and is especially dear to me."

"Well, I never!" Prudence returned, dryly, as she left the room.

The instant Prudence was gone, Joan seized Rodney's face between both hands and gave it a well-meant, if somewhat rough, rubbing.

"Oh, life is so interesting out here!" she cried, happily. "And you are so good to me, dear, dear Rodney!"

Rodney drew her close in his arms. "You are a

witch, little girl," he said, with a vibrant note of joy in his voice.

Joan was a new joy to him every day. Her face was so full of an ever-changing charm. She had a new face for every day, or so it seemed to Rodney, and the artistic element in him was sufficiently selfish to rejoice in the pleasure her irregular little profile afforded his eyes.

Her brown hair now caught the level rays of the sun dancing in through the window, and showed golden on the wind-roughened curves of the thick waves. Her face was flushed from the wild run she and Mona and Don, followed by the horde of Indian children, had made from the school house to the cottage.

She drew a long breath of happiness as she snuggled closer to him.

"Life is so very interesting, Rodney, dear." She sighed, ecstatically. "And Miss Reeves is so beautiful and so exceedingly helpful and sympathetic. She said she hoped I would continue to imagine fairy tales, except during school hours. During school hours she is extremely desirous of having me acquire a general knowledge of things. Miss Reeves is also exceedingly well versed in the Bible, Rodney. We had a long talk about it this afternoon at recess. She is extremely logical, too. She

almost completely shattered my faith in Christian Science. Although, I think one should always think health. It makes one so much happier. But Miss Reeves made me see plainly that Christ never denied the existence of disease, and I should rather believe what He says than Miss Warren. I am so glad I met Miss Reeves. It is so hard for a little girl to see things clearly, and while I have a mind of my own [Rodney smiled] I do not pretend to think I understand everything as I should."

Rodney's eyes were full of love and pride as he smiled down into the upturned face, with the rapt, wonderful eyes.

"What subject do you like best?" he asked, suddenly.

"Geography," Joan returned, promptly. "Especially the California portion—when I studied about California to-day, I imagined it was just as delightful as eating a dish of ice cream. I am so extremely interested in it. Did you ever eat ice cream, Rodney?" She drew away from him and looked up into his face, her level eyes scintillating with interest.

Rodney put his hand up to his face to hide the mirth he could not keep from twitching at his lips.

"Yes, dear," he said at last and very gently.

It had just dawned upon him that perhaps this child had never eaten ice cream.

“ Oh! I am so delighted. Please tell me exactly how ice cream tastes. I’ve read and read about ice cream, especially strawberry ice cream, until I’ve been so thrilled I could scarcely breathe at the very thought of it, and you are the very first person it has been my fate to meet who can and will tell me how ice cream feels on your tongue. I know it is very cold, for the ice part of it proves that, and I’ve eaten loads and loads of icicles and tried to imagine them ice cream, but I always suffered agonies with my throat afterward. I tried it once while I was at Miss Warren’s, and she said my thinking my throat was sore was just another mistake of mortal mind. I was convinced at the time my throat was really sore because I could scarcely swallow. I asked Miss Warren for a piece of red flannel to tie around my throat, but she would not give it to me. She said: ‘ It will not do to pamper mortal mind.’ Miss Warren was not stingy, either,” she added, honestly. “ She was not even nigh. It was a matter of principle with her, and while I believed thoroughly in the red flannel, because I had tried it often in the past, I admired Miss Warren’s adherence to principle. I read about ‘ adherence to principle ’ once in a book, and it

sounded so magnificent that I have always remembered it. 'Adherence to principle' is a wonderful thing," she rolled the words in evident enjoyment. "My throat was all right next morning, and Miss Warren said it never had been sore, but I have never eaten icicles since, for fear I'd imagine it was sore again."

Rodney got up and moved over to the window, and looked out across the sandy road. Mona was just outside the gate, waiting for Joan. His eyes came back to Don, lying curled up on the porch like a ball of gold.

When he again looked at Joan, she was sitting on the floor by his chair, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her palms, a world of mystery in her fathomless eyes.

"Joan, how would you like to have a party?" he asked. "We'll have one if you like; there will be ice cream, so that you can taste the real strawberry article, and . . ."

Like a flash Joan was across the room and had him pinioned by the lapels of his coat, her hands trembling as they grasped the cloth.

"Oh, Rodney! Rodney! How perfectly lovely! I have longed, all my life, for a really and truly party. Rodney! Rodney! You are so good to me. I can just see myself asking Mona if she will have

another helping of ice cream—Ice cream!” she repeated, shutting her eyes the better to foresee that triumphant moment.

“And we will invite Miss Reeves, too, won’t we, Rodney? I love Miss Reeves with every bit of my heart that is not already given to you and Mona. She has such charming manners, and I feel instinctively that she is a kindred spirit. Just think, Rodney! We are going to have recitations every Friday afternoon, just like they have in city schools every Friday. Miss Reeves says she observed Friday afternoon all last term, although she observed it by reading to the children. She says Mona is able to recite very nicely, and she believes I will be able to give something interesting.”

Rodney did not doubt but that Joan would give something interesting if left to her own devices, as he hoped she would be.

“Miss Reeves says that perhaps you will come over and listen to the programme, and perhaps, just perhaps, we can get poor Mr. Arth to go and take some real enjoyment in life. I had thought of reciting the last two chapters of “Revelation.” I can put my whole soul in them, but I say them to Mr. Arth every morning, because he enjoys them so. He says until I came over there the other morning that he had almost forgotten the very existence of

the Bible—can you even imagine such a thing, Rodney? But now he says he is beginning to feel like a Christian again. Isn't that splendid?"

Before Rodney could answer, Joan was chattering about the proposed party, but he could hear the silver voice of the old minister saying: "You are a sweet spirit come to Rainbow Springs to bring peace to the hearts of many."

Rodney called on Arth that evening and found the sick man propped up in bed reading Joan's Bible, which she had taken over to him that morning, because he had none of his own.

Arth smiled dryly at Rodney, as he held out his long, thin hand, and said: "I think she is going to help me die like a Christian, old man."

Rodney pressed the thin hand sympathetically, as he returned fervently, "The same here, Arth. If I live, I shall live the better for her coming into my life, and if I do not live my greatest regret will be that I cannot see her grown and educated as she should be. She says it's the dream of her life to go to college some day, and that dream shall come true if I live, although I will not even think what her being away even for a day will mean to me. Of course, should I not live she will be well provided for; I have already seen to that. Shall I tell you about the night she came to me?"

Arth nodded. He had heard the story from Joan, but was content to hear it from Rodney also.

So Rodney held the sick man's hand in his tender, understanding grasp while he told him of his lonely childhood, unbrightened by a tender woman's love. A life void of the demonstrations of love he had craved all his life. He told how until Joan came into his life his whole soul was full of love for his violin. He spared nothing in the telling, but recounted the yearly custom of leaving the door open on Christmas Eve, because his grandmother had requested that it should be left ajar every Holy Eve until some one came again out of the storm. His voice quivered as he told of his farewell to his beloved Amati and the coming of Joan in answer to its call. Arth's eyes brightened when Rodney told him of the old minister's prophetic speech concerning the child. He laughed when Rodney told him of Joan's almost shattered faith in Miss Warren's belief, and his eyes grew tender over the icicle episode and enthusiastically beaming when Rodney told of the proposed party.

"I'll come, old man," Arth said, as Rodney started to leave. "If it's the last thing I do, I'll be there—if—if I am here to do it," he added, whimsically.

While Rodney made his call on Arth, Joan and Mona made their way to the Cave of Rest, in the early twilight.

Some one has fitly called the desert "The land of mystic silence and thin air." The mysterious charm of it was ever making its appeal to Joan. She had not missed a sunrise since that first memorable morning when she and Rodney had witnessed the double mirage. She had not seen another mirage, but she loved the dawns, with their pearly gray tints, shot across by flashes of blood-red flames of the morning sun creeping up from behind the rugged mountains. And then the softening of the vivid red as the sun itself soared high above the mountains in an opalescent sky. How beautiful it was when the purple veil of coming night was flung over the dimpling mountains!

But at night, when the mystic desert moon rode high in the zenith, Joan was filled with such ecstasy that she could almost see a vision of heaven itself in the tranquil path of the moon.

On this night, the hand of God had decorated the sky and the half-hidden, half-revealed desert world with a soft translucent radiance so sublime that Joan could only look upon the majesty of the night in awed silence, her hand clasped tight in Mona's, until they reached the twin palms and

looked back down on the mystically shadowed village. Back of the village lay the desert, silver-tipped, serene, and peaceful, swept by a cool breeze. The night was a poem of deep shadows and silver bars of light laid lightly over the mystic land.

“I had a mind full of mortal triumph and a mouth watering for ice cream,” Joan said at last, in an awed little voice. “Oh, I was just full of imaginations of how nice and thrilling it would be to have a real party when we started up here, and now I feel as if the sight of God’s beautiful world is almost more than I can bear. I’ll never pine for anything like ice cream again, Mona. I am not sure that it is not wicked to long for such things. How can God have patience with such a small piece of his handiwork, as I am when I’m always longing for something I do not need and *such* unspiritual things as parties and ice cream. Mona, dear, I am so disgusted at myself at times, I am so eternally wanting something I have never had before. Just think what God has given me this past month, a home and Rodney, and you and Don and Aunt Prudence. I am very fond of Aunt Prudence, even though she does not approve of much I do. There’s another thing I’m always wanting, and that is to have her hug and kiss me as Rodney does. I believe she is softening at me just a little bit at the corners,

but she never wanted me, and deep down in the bottom of my heart I do not blame her. I am perfectly sure I am not anxious to share Rodney with everybody, myself, but then she does not show Rodney any more affection than she does me in any way except in her cooking. She is the most beautiful cook in the world, Mona, dear; you know that by the few things you have sampled, and she takes great pains to prepare Rodney everything he likes best just as he likes it. That would seem to indicate that she loved him, but was not built so that she could show her love by tender words and hugs and kisses.

“But to go back to the ice cream subject, Mona. I brought you up here to tell it to you, and I am going to enjoy your pleasure in it, and the party and Rodney’s pleasure in spoiling me, as Aunt Prudence calls his always humoring me in every imaginable way, but I’ll remember this night, and if I get to taking too much bodily enjoyment in it all myself, I hope I shall not be punished by the Lord as he punished the Israelites when they howled and cried for meat. But then, I suppose there is not the same danger. Rodney is going to give me the ice cream, and I am sure, much as I deserve it, he would not bury me in it as the Lord submerged the Israelites with quail, but just the same, something out here

in the night makes me feel ticklish about it all. Such happiness, as I have had ever since Christmas surely can not last forever."

She sighed, and then forgot Mona and her fears for her over-indulgence as she gazed wide-eyed at the beauties of the desert world by night.

Mona did not in the least comprehend her white friend, and her only response to Joan's frequent outbursts was a silent pressure of the hand almost always nestling in her stronger one. Mona loved Joan with all the intensity of her passionate nature. The subject mattered little to her at any time, it was the sound of Joan's voice and the light in her eyes that were dear to Mona. Now she watched Joan, rapt and radiant, standing there like some exalted mystic, until the night grew chill, and she knew by the passage of the moon across the sky that it was long past Joan's bedtime.

"Your Rodney would wish you home now," she said at last, very softly.

Joan turned to her with a smile, and only one of them realized that they had not finished their trip to the Cave of Rest.

Prudence did not approve of the plan for the party, but Miss Reeves entered into the spirit of it, and helped Rodney so materially by suggestions,

with such whole-hearted joy, that Rodney appreciated her all the more before the eventful day arrived.

Lois Reeves was not a pretty young woman, but she had that baffling, provoking modern beauty which secures its charming effect by some vividness of accent, and triumphs by some ugliness subdued. Lois was a charming, womanly girl, with a happy way of winning and holding friends. She had the gift, too, to bring out all that was best in those with whom she came in contact. Even the stolid little Indian children became less stolid and more responsive under her tutelage, and they had seemed an almost hopeless proposition to her when they were first ranged up before her by their parents.

Lois Reeves loved Mona and spent many hours with her before the arrival of Joan, and now Joan had crept into her heart, and she spent every possible hour with the two little girls.

And under her affectionate and wholesome influence Joan expanded like a flower.

Lois had heard several of Joan's fairy tales, and looked forward with much pleasure to the new order of Friday afternoons.

That first Friday afternoon Joan was thrilled with happiness and something akin to fear, because not only Rodney and Arth attended the school ex-

ercises, but Sam Welch and Martha were also there, and to the surprise of them all, Prudence honored the place with her presence, sitting bold upright on the edge of her chair between the Major and Welch. The two men were even then in the beginning of the courtship that served as an exquisite bit of amusement to Rodney and Arth all that long, inactive winter.

Prudence, made conspicuous by the presence of her two cavaliers, had a bright red spot on either cheek, and scarce heard a word of the mumbled lines spoken by several of the Indian children, persuaded by Lois Reeves up to the hour itself, and their backsliding spirits renewed to the actual effort itself by Rodney's promise of much candy if they would only do as their teacher wished.

Mona next spoke, very quaintly, a short piece, and then came Joan's turn to render one of her own fairy tales.

"Once upon a time," Joan began, her voice all trembling. "Once upon a time," she repeated, firmly, as she caught the flicker of a mocking smile on the Major's face.

A third time she repeated those four talismanic words, then continued:—

"There were two Kings. One of them was a giant. The giant's home was on an island in the

midst of the sea. The island was called 'Rab,' because that was the giant's name.

"The giant had once, many years before, been a man of ordinary stature. This was before he stole the Golden Butterfly from King Jethone of the land of Jethone. The Golden Butterfly was a magic butterfly, and enabled him to change his stature by making a wish. By wishes he also raised up a people of giants about him, and built by wishes many magnificent castles on the top of the mountain that rose two thousand feet or more in height in the center of the island.

"Now the King Jethone of that time was the grandson of the King Jethone from whom King Rab had stolen the Golden Butterfly. And this King Jethone had great need of the Golden Butterfly that was his by right, because he was well stricken with years, and the kings of the surrounding countries, knowing his weakness, were making invasions into the outer borders of the land of Jethone. They carried away with them each time more than a thousand sheep, and horses and cattle too numerous to mention.

"At last King Jethone announced that he would give his daughter, in marriage, to the youth who brought to him the magic Golden Butterfly, then in possession of King Rab, the giant.

“King Jethone’s daughter, Ethelina, was the most beautiful princess in the whole world—even as fair was she as were the second daughters of Job. So many youths answered the summons and made valiant efforts to secure the Golden Butterfly. But none of them were ever permitted to cross the restless water between Rab’s island and the main land.

“One day when King Jethone was in the deepest depths of despair, one of his prime ministers told him that a strange musician was at the outer gate of the palace and wished to come in and play before the King. The King loved music, so he graciously permitted the musician to enter and play to him.

“And it came to pass that the musician was as handsome as Ethelina was beautiful, and as he played his violin all the troubles of the King seemed to vanish as by magic.”

For just an instant she hesitated, and her eyes met Rodney’s, in a sweet, grateful flash, then she continued.

“The heart of the King at last grew so light that he forgot the Golden Butterfly, for which he had longed with all his heart until that hour.

“When the musician grew weary and rested, the King bethought himself of the Golden Butterfly, and told the tale of its magic to the young musician.

"The musician's name was Romo, and when the King had finished his story, Romo's eyes were flashing with determination. He told the King that he, Romo, would bring him the Golden Butterfly and win for himself the beautiful Ethelina, of whom he had heard much in far and distant lands.

"That evening Romo played for the Queen and Ethelina, and to him, as he played, Ethelina gave her maiden heart's first and last love, and the Queen was glad, because she greatly admired Romo, and believed he would succeed where all the rest had failed.

"Next morning Ethelina pinned a white rose on Romo's coat, and he started forth in his quest, with his violin under his arm. As he journeyed along toward his goal, Romo played his violin before many and strange people, but at last he reached the edge of the water surrounding Rab's island.

"A lone boatman rowed close up to the shore and, to him, Romo made his appeal to row him over to Rab's island.

"The boatman opened his mouth and showed Romo a tongueless cavity that proved beyond doubt that he could not speak.

"As he dolefully shook his head that he would

not row Romo across the glittering expanse of rippling water, Romo girded his clothing about him and sprang into the boat.

"The old boatman said not a word, but reached into his pocket and took from it a crumpled rose leaf. He opened the rose leaf, and Romo saw a few golden grains of fine powder, before the old man gently hurled the rose leaf at him. When Romo looked down at where his hands and feet were, he could not see them. He held his hand up before his eyes, but could not see it, neither was his violin visible, but he could still feel it, so he suddenly realized that the old man had made him invisible, which proved beyond doubt that the old man wished him to succeed, so Romo's heart beat joyfully, and his soul sang within him as the boat bumped against the island.

"He looked about him, and behold! the old man and the boat were also invisible, so Romo marked well the spot where he landed, with a peculiar stone he found near by.

"Then he saw before his very eyes the giant King, stretched out asleep at the foot of the mountain. He took his violin out of its case and began to play. Presently the giant opened his eyes, and they were so large and fierce that Romo was exceedingly frightened until he gratefully remembered that the

giant could not see him, so he played on and on most beautifully, until the giant rose and started up the mountain in great fear and much trembling, for the violin sounded to the giant like the voice of many angels, and his conscience began to prick him sore because he had stolen the Golden Butterfly so many years before.

“Romo ceased playing his violin, and followed the King up the mountain. At the top of the mountain the King was joined by other giants, and he began to imagine he had been dreaming instead of hearing music, and so his pangs of conscience left him, and he went into one of the palaces to a gorgeous dinner with numerous other giants and giantesses.

“Romo started to follow the giant King, when he noticed a great building like a cathedral. The door was open, so he went in there. There was a great pipe organ at the back of the building, the inside of which was studded with precious stones. That building was almost as beautiful within and without as the ‘New Holy City’ described in ‘Revelation,’ and Romo stood spellbound in silent admiration until a man in a robe entered from a door at the side of the pipe organ. The robed man seated himself before the huge organ and commenced to play. Of course the man was a giant or

he could not have managed to play such an immense instrument.

“The music was so beautiful and wonderful that for a time Romo wanted to hide from the splendor of it. After a time he could bear it better, and by and by he began to play his violin. He could not help it. The music of the organ seemed to compel him to answer it with his violin.

“As he played there came out of the organ a beautiful Golden Butterfly, very large and brilliant. It sailed about over Romo’s head for awhile, and then lighted on his violin.

“Romo could from that moment play no more in the wonderful building, and presently the giant at the organ ceased playing, and with a little sigh, the Golden Butterfly folded its wings and crept into Romo’s violin.

“So Romo realized that he had met with the approval of the great spirit of magic, and the Golden Butterfly was his, to take to the King of the land of Jethone.

“He hastened down to the water’s edge and found the rock laid on the edge of the island to mark the place where he had left the boat. And it came about that he found the invisible boat and the invisible boatman, and was rowed across to the main land.

“On the journey across the rippling waves, Romo wished that the boatman had his tongue again and everything he wished for in the world.

“And it happened that when the boat touched the main land that the boatman was suddenly visible and so was he.

“And even as he wished, the boatman had a new tongue in his head, and he opened his mouth and spoke to Romo, and thanked him for wishing his tongue restored, and then he said: ‘Now let thy servant die in peace with all the members of his body with him,’ and so he died, and Romo hastened on to the Jethone country.

“King Jethone met Romo with open arms, and the Princess Ethelina was so happy he had come back to her in safety that she shed many happy tears on his manly shoulder.

“The Golden Butterfly is still in the Jethone country, and when Romo plays it often perches on his shoulder and listens to the beautiful strains of his music, while the King, his youth and health renewed, listens while he and the Queen and Romo’s beautiful bride rejoice that such a noble youth as Romo restored to them the wonderful Golden Butterfly and their Kingdom.”

Every one but the Major and Prudence encored

Joan warmly. Even William Arth clapped his hands with all his feeble strength.

Prudence was secretly proud of Joan's manner of speaking, which was truly dramatic, but she did not intend to encourage the child in speaking such pieces. Not for an instant did she, at that time, dream that the story was Joan's own.

The Major would not approve in any way any thing Joan did. And he glared contemptuously at Sam Welch, who clapped his hands until they were almost blistered.

As an encore, Joan recited the "Sermon on the Mount," and even Prudence involuntarily added her share of approval to the applause that followed.

There was an unseen listener there that day. The Indian lad, Chawa. And the inspired Joan touched a chord in his savage heart that had never been touched before.

When they reached home, Prudence announced that she had a headache. "And no wonder," she snapped, crossly. "It's enough to make any one's head ache to hear a tale about giants. Don't you know there never were any giants, Joan?"

Joan's lips quivered for an instant, then she answered with her usual spirit.

"I know there are no giants now, Aunt Prudence,

but there were giants upon the earth at one time."

"Don't be silly, Joan. There never were any giants," Prudence snorted, her eyes cold and sharp.

Rodney sighed.

"I beg your pardon, but there were giants in Bible times," Joan returned, politely but firmly.

"Some place in Genesis it says: 'There were giants in the earth in those days.'"

"Joan, I am ashamed of you," Prudence snapped.

"You spoke 'The Sermon on the Mount' very nicely, and I am very glad you refrained from giving us any heresy, as I was afraid you would, but you should be very careful not to say things are in the Bible when they are not." She set her lips together and started from the room.

"Please wait a minute, Aunt Prudence," Joan pleaded. Then she turned to Rodney. "Rodney, will you lend me your Bible?"

"It is on my table," Rodney answered, inwardly hoping that Joan was correct, although he confessed that for the life of him he could not remember any mention of giants in the Bible.

It was a very proud, very triumphant Joan who flew into the room an instant later, with the Bible open at the sixth chapter of Genesis.

"Read it for yourself," she demanded, facing Prudence, with her finger on the fourth verse.

Prudence read, then without a word left the room, her head high in the air.

Her conscience forced her to return a moment later.

"You are correct, Joan," she said, stiffly, "but I do not approve of that tale of yours, just the same."

Prudence never did approve of Joan's fairy tales, but Rodney did, and that was all-sufficient for Joan. And each day Rodney asked himself which Joan he loved best. The dreamy-eyed Joan of the story-telling hour, for Joan told Rodney and Arth fairy tales of her own making every night after that, or the will-o'-the-wisp Joan flying over the desert with Mona and Don.

Joan invited the Major to her party, but he refused very stiffly, saying: "I don't eat with half-breeds and serpents."

"Eating with Mona and Mr. Welch would not hurt you, I am sure," Joan flashed back at him, adding to his store of hatred of her. "Jesus ate with Zaccheus, and Zaccheus was a sinner, and I am sure Mona and Mr. Welch are no more sinners than you are, and if Jesus could eat with publicans and sinners, you surely could eat with Mr. Welch and Mona, but I am sure I do not want you to come unless you wish to," she added, and was gone before

the Major could make a sufficiently bitter retort. So the Major was not at the party, although several of his paying guests were there, and no one missed the Major, unless perchance Prudence did, but that is difficult to imagine since Welch was so mournfully attentive to her that no one else had more than a passing chance to speak to her.

In spite of her resolve not to be too much thrilled by the party and other mortal enjoyments, Joan was so afire with excitement that she was like some beautiful winged thing, and Rodney and Arth and Lois smiled more than once at her sheer exuberance of childish joy.

Chawa, whom all the Indians, and even Mona, thought to be somewhere out on the desert, where he spent more than half his time, in the Major's pay, searching for the old minister's mysterious mines, looked on the happy party from his post of vantage, in the shady crotch of a huge pepper tree that spread itself in feathery beauty over the northern half of the porch, and for the first time in Chawa's savage existence, he felt a strange longing to be one of the happy group he looked upon. It was the first struggle of the spirit of his white father pitted against the more pronounced spirit of his great-grandfather, Fighting Wolf.

Joan went to her bed that night, so athrill with

the perfect realization of long-imagined happiness that it was long before she went to sleep, and when she did sleep her dreams were rose-hued, unsuggestive of the exciting things that would happen on the morrow.

CHAPTER VIII

RAINBOW SPRINGS awoke that next morning in the throes of a sand-storm. The atmosphere was surcharged with that haunting sense of the unknown and mysterious that is felt most strongly whenever the elements make war within the desert boundaries.

The mountains were half-hidden by a mist of fine sand through which the sun shone fitfully. The shifting sand hills, revealed by lulls in the fury of the storm, seemed to be moving restlessly wave upon wave, drift upon drift, swirl upon swirl in subtle serpentine undulations. Close upon the heels of each momentary lull in the storm, a swirling cloud of sand would rise and whirl majestically up the road, and a good stiff wind, with its fingers on the keys of the gyrating spiral, whistled a merry carol of joy because the crest of that whirling column of sand touched the sky while the feet of it playfully scuffed the fine sand up from the willing road.

While the storm raged, Joan and Mona and Don danced gleefully about in the little yard in front

of Rodney's cottage with spirits as willfully exuberant as the spirit of the wind and sand.

Rodney watched the gleeful trio with a smile of artistic appreciation, then he laughed aloud, as up the road came two flying Indian children, their little bodies glistening like copper in the misty yellow glow of the sun-illuminated gale of sand. With arms widespread, Flying Eagle and Marina swept past the house, against the full force of the wind, howling and shouting with savage glee.

"The spirit of their great-grandfather, Fighting Wolf, is in them," spoke the Major at Rodney's elbow.

"Ah, good-morning, Major," Rodney said, stiffly. "I did not know you were here."

The Major laughed, and rubbed his sleek, white hands together. "That very estimable aunt of yours and I have been having a brief conversation," he answered, with a suave smile. "Splendid woman, my boy, and a most excellent cook."

Rodney smiled, dryly.

Flying Eagle and Marina came racing down the road again, arms flapping bird-like, copper-hued bodies glowing, voices shrill with childish and barbaric enjoyment.

"Chawa is back," the Major said, abruptly. "He's a devil, too," he added. "But he is the

exact replica of the great Fighting Wolf, therefore idolized by the whole tribe. So is Flying Eagle, the taller of those two rushing up the road clad only in nature's garments."

"Yes." Rodney spoke the monosyllable abstractedly. In some strange manner he seemed overwhelmed with a sense of foreboding evil—evil to the child, Joan. As one in a dream he heard the Major's oily voice saying, "Chawa and Flying Eagle are the only direct descendants of Fighting Wolf. Chawa is debarred from the chiefship because of his white blood. Flying Eagle will be chief some day soon instead of Pedro, who is the grandson of the brother of the great Fighting Wolf. Were this a hundred years ago, Flying Eagle, young as he is, would be the chief. But the white man decrees that Pedro shall rule yet awhile."

"What white man?" Rodney asked, disinterestedly.

"Ah!" The word was long drawn and sycophantic. "Dear boy, how should I know?"

Rodney caught a certain crafty gleam in the beady eyes, and with a short, "How, indeed?" moved to the door and called Joan in to breakfast.

Joan came joyfully, Don bounding beside her. Mona slipped across into the reservation with a low-voiced farewell until school.

Rodney unconsciously frowned at the retreating back of the little half-breed. The Major had rasped his nerves as usual, and the gleam he had caught in the Major's eyes accentuated his feeling of impending evil.

The happy light died out of Joan's eyes when she saw the unctuous Major, and she went stiffly from the room.

By the time breakfast was over the sand-storm was in the last throes of dissolution. The fitfully flying sand, the last fling of the capricious wind, was luminous with a beautiful golden light, and the mountains stood out in purple-toned relief against a many-hued sky.

When Joan started for school, after her usual hour spent in caring for Arth, the sky was as blue and serene as only the desert sky can be.

Only in the Indian children could the after effects of the sand-storm be felt. They were restless and unruly, and by the middle of the forenoon, Lois Reeves was almost worn out by her efforts to keep Flying Eagle and Marina, the most restless of all the children, in their seats. To make them even pretend to study was impossible, although she exerted every faculty to gain control of them.

When Chawa suddenly appeared in the doorway she felt that her cup of trouble was more than full.

The coming of Chawa was the coming of trouble even when the other children were under control.

Chawa, like Mona, was perfectly symmetrical. But his eyes were the eyes of the untamed savage, black and flashing, full of barbaric fire. Chawa's face was as delicately chiseled as his sister's, but was of savage darkness, and his beakish nose was the nose of the true Indian.

Still, as he stood there in the doorway, Lois could not but admire the untamed spirit he presented. An instant later she regretted having, even for a moment, allowed herself to admire Chawa's wild beauty.

He stalked majestically into the room, glancing neither to the right or left, and took his seat directly in front of Mona and Joan.

Flying Eagle sat directly across the aisle from the two girls; Marina sat just in front of Flying Eagle and directly across the aisle from the seat Chawa had taken unto himself.

From his pockets, the half-breed lad took two wriggling lizards, each dangling at the end of a long string. With an air of complete nonchalance, he tossed the lizards across the aisle—one to Flying Eagle, one to Marina.

Lois knew at that moment she had lost control

of her school for that day. Punishment, as applied by the rod, was not allowed her. No one is ever permitted to strike an Indian child. "It would break their spirits," claim the Indian parents—and the breaking of the spirit of the Indian child is something not permitted.

With fiendish cries of triumph, Flying Eagle and Marina fell upon the lizards, and before Lois could reach them, were tearing the little creatures to pieces. That the lizards wriggled and struggled to free their partially dismembered bodies from their tormentors only added to the zest of the game to the little barbarians.

Lois had seen such sights before, but she knew that to Joan such cruelty was something new, and to a child like her was torture.

Lois intended, in her sweet way, to reason with the culprits and perhaps stand them in a corner for an hour or so. This mode of punishment was permitted her.

But neither Lois nor Mona, knowing Chawa as they did, were prepared for his next move.

When Lois was opposite him, he took from his pocket a dead rattlesnake, perhaps a foot long, of the "side-winder" type, and flung it with unerring aim in the face of the teacher.

Lois Reeves, mortally afraid of snakes living or

dead, promptly fainted. Chawa sprang over her prostrate body and was off like a flash.

Flying Eagle and Marina, wrought to a high state of savage fury by the events of the morning, flung themselves upon Lois, and began to tear at her clothing and flay her with their hands while they shouted and shrieked in savage triumph.

Joan had been spellbound, unable to move, during the first part of the excitement, but the sight of her beloved teacher prone on her face, with the little Indians tearing at her as they had torn at the lizards a few minutes before, aroused her.

With a cry of rage she sprang from her seat, and an instant later had Flying Eagle and Marina in a firm grasp.

"Get some water," she commanded Mona, and Mona flew to do the bidding of her white friend, her great eyes grave and sad. She had witnessed the outrage on her beloved teacher with an aching heart but with the stoical patience bequeathed her by her Indian mother.

Chawa had thrown the water from the pail in the anteroom on his way out, so Mona had to go to the spring, fully a block away, for the desired water.

When she returned the teacher was sitting up on

the floor, vainly imploring Joan to cease her punishment of the Indian children.

Joan, with a strength that seemed superhuman, when one thought only of her slender body, was shaking the two little Indians, terrier-like, while she poured a torrent of invectives upon them.

"You dirty little beasts," she panted, as she shook them. And in spite of herself, Lois could not help smiling at the fire blazing in Joan's eyes. Purple and steel flashing eyes were they now.

"Crack! Crack!"

The heads of the two Indian children came together with a final spurt of Joan's fury-given strength.

"I'll never forgive you for what you have done, never! never!" she cried, holding Flying Eagle and Marina from her while she rested an instant.

Then "Crack! Crack!" The two heads came together with another vehement impact.

"How dare you, how dare you treat Miss Reeves as you do? It's bad enough to tear poor little living things to pieces, but to do such things to Miss Reeves!" A sob burst from Joan, but she banged the Indian heads together again, while she panted and sobbed in her anger.

"Joan! Stop instantly," Lois cried, as Mona dashed into the room with the water.

Only one of them saw Chawa peering in at one of the windows, but Chawa had been a delighted witness of the whole proceeding.

"Joan, please stop; you do not know my people," Mona pleaded, as Joan, unmindful of Miss Reeves, still shook the little Indians, banging their heads together at regular intervals, but with ever-decreasing strength. With a final impact of the two black heads, Joan flung the children down, and fell on the floor beside the teacher, who still sat on the floor too weak to rise.

"Oh! Oh! I am so sorry you saw such an exhibition of my wicked temper," Joan wailed, flinging her arms around Lois.

Lois drew the shaking little form in a tender embrace.

"Don't cry, dear," she pleaded, patting Joan's shoulders.

"I am so miserable, I must cry," Joan sobbed. "I feel perfectly justified in punishing Flying Eagle and Marina, but I should not have allowed myself to become so angry. I've vented my temper on Mona's cousins, and will perhaps lose her friendship for life—and I couldn't stand to lose Mona's friendship, Miss Reeves. She is my first and only bosom friend, and I prayed for one all my life, and she has always seemed the most beauti-

ful answer to that prayer—besides I am afraid you will not care any longer for one who can get so terribly angry. I ought to be sorry aside from losing yours and Mona's friendship, but something inside me is just clamoring with joy because I punished Flying Eagle and Marina for their outrage on you. If I could just get hold of Chawa—I know he is Mona's brother, and they are orphans too—I'd punish him with every remnant of strength I have left, and the remnant I have seems rather worn; in fact, I feel rather shaky all over."

Lois pushed the tangled hair back from the damp, flushed face. "You are a dear child," she said, tenderly, "and I assure you I love you, and if nothing comes of this to harm you, I shall forgive Chawa and the children most gladly."

Chawa, at the window, grinned wickedly.

"And you really love me?" Joan questioned, eyes alight, face aglow.

Lois drew her closer. "Yes, dear, so does Mona."

Joan embraced Lois rapturously; then looked around at Mona.

Mona smiled at her wistful face, yet her eyes were very grave as she answered.

"I, Mona, gave my white friend my love up there where gathers the dust blown by the four winds.

I, Mona, am true—my love is true. Even now I love my friend more than ever before—now when she most needs my love.” She stooped and kissed a very grateful yet somewhat awed Joan, then flung herself in the seat she and Joan had shared for such a short time in perfect joy. Her face was hidden in her arms, and her shoulders shook. Not a tear would she shed, but those dry, hard sobs racked her slender body.

A very wide-eyed, awed Flying Eagle, with a large bump on the right side of his forehead, sat beside an equally awed and wide-eyed Marina on the seat where Joan had flung them. The only difference in the general appearance of the children was noticeable in the rapidly swelling bumps on their foreheads—Marina’s swelling was on the left instead of on the right of her forehead.

Lois could not repress a smile as she looked at them over Joan’s shoulder.

The dead snake lay close beside Lois, but she saw nothing but the trembling little body she held close to her while she murmured over her tender, soothing, cooing love phrases. The dignity of the school teacher was submerged by the tender maternal love that welled up in her heart for the little motherless child.

From time to time she looked pityingly at Mona,

but she could not bring herself to pet her as she was petting Joan. She loved Mona perhaps as well as she did Joan, but just then the Indian blood in the little half-breed stood like a huge red wall between her and Lois.

Chawa finally left his post of vantage, outside the window, in great disgust. He did not care to see longer a set of sniveling squaws.

His eyes had flashed with admiration while Joan banged the heads of his cousins together, but a sobbing Joan disgusted him, yet strangely enough, he realized that he was not nearly so disgusted at Joan as he was at Mona, and he knew that Joan was shedding real tears and Mona was as dry-eyed as was he.

It was high noon before even a semblance of order was restored in the school. The dozen or more Indian children who had not been actively connected with the excitement had looked on the whole affair with immobile faces, and if one of them was in the least thrilled with the zest of the battle not for an instant was it reflected on their countenances. Flying Eagle and Marina at last took their accustomed places, subdued and strangely eager to respond to the slightest command of Lois.

It had been Mona—a very sorrowful, grave-eyed Mona—who cleared away the dead snake and the

still quivering members of the lizards. When she took her place by Joan she drew her close in a protective embrace, and so held her all the rest of the morning. Lois kept the children as late as she dared that morning, then accompanied Joan home.

The Major was still at Rodney's, and when he had heard the story of the morning, he tapped his finger-tips together and assumed a tragically paternal air toward Joan that was extremely irritating to Rodney.

"I am afraid there will be trouble between the Indians and their pale-faced brethren over this. You should have been discreet, my child. I have influence with my red brothers." He turned and swept the little group with his beady eyes. "But," he lowered his voice, tragically, "the very first schoolmaster here, many years ago, was killed by the Indians for whipping an Indian child—and that child was not a little chief—Flying Eagle is, but we will see, yes, we will see what can be done. I am the only one who can influence Pedro, and it all depends on Pedro." He pursed up his thick lips and tapped his finger-tips together while he repeated, "Yes, it depends on Pedro—and myself."

Lois Reeves knew that the Major spoke the truth when he said he was the only one who could influ-

ence Pedro. And the Major had an almost uncanny power over the Indian chief.

Her eyes met Rodney's in a swift, meaning look that made Rodney recall the Major's conversation of the early morning.

The Major, then, was the white man who kept Pedro his chiefship. Truly the Major did have influence over the Indians. With Joan in the circle of his arms, he began to form a plan to leave Rainbow Springs on the next train.

The Major evidently read his thoughts.

"That would not do," he snapped. "You must stay with it. If you started to leave here before the powwow the Indians will have to-night, you would cause an uprising of all the Indians of the Reservation. You would never reach the station. Trust it all to me."

"Oh, if you can really be trusted," Lois mused, as she watched his shifting, beady eyes, with the gleam of avarice back of them—a gleam that she and Rodney read aright.

Prudence, who had listened thus far without speaking, now turned on Rodney.

"This is what you get by taking in a strange child of whom you know nothing. We shall all be scalped. I feel it in my bones, and all because of that fool custom of leaving the door open on

Christmas Eve for any vagabond to come in that happens along. Bah! You are a fool. All the male Whites have been fools ever since your grandfather's wife come into the house with her big eyes and appealing kittenish ways. The women have some sense, thank goodness."

"It is true, Aunt Prue, that I have had Joan only since Christmas, but she is mine now legally, thank God, and I shall hear nothing said against her. I know all of Joan's childhood, and it is as pure and true as yours or mine.

"If she has caused any trouble for us she caused it by doing the only honorable and courageous thing possible for her teacher. I glory in what she did. I believe every one who properly respects Miss Reeves should be willing to take the effects of Joan's just punishment of Miss Reeves's tormentors and I have no doubt that the good Major will straighten everything out with the chief."

At the close of Rodney's somewhat heated speech, Joan flung vehement arms about his neck, and began to sob softly. He drew her close to him, and Lois Reeves gave a little prayer of thanks because such a man was the guardian of the sensitive, loyal child.

Prudence sniffed and left the room with her head held high in the air. She had openly defied Rodney

and told of Joan's recent adoption. She did not know that Rodney had told both Arth and Lois Reeves.

"Of course the Major knows it," Prudence mused, as she went through the dining-room, "but then the Major is such a wonderful man it is right to tell him everything. I am glad I spit it out," she said aloud, defiantly, as she reached the kitchen, yet she knew that deep down in her heart she was vaguely sorry for the way she had spoken about the child. She cared more for Joan than she would have acknowledged to herself.

When Sam Welch, more mournful in appearance than ever, knocked at the kitchen door, she welcomed him in a manner that made his pale eyes glow for an instant before they drifted back into their gloomy, set way of looking at the world.

When Welch and Prudence entered the living-room, they found Joan on a stool at Lois's feet. The Major and Rodney were out on the porch talking in low tones.

"Well, little girl, you've made the Injuns madder than a few at you, have you?" Welch demanded, solemnly, as he took Joan's hands in his and shook them in his own loose way.

"Oh, Mr. Welch, you can understand how I feel, I know you can!" Joan cried, springing to

her feet. "Miss Reeves and Rodney understand me, but Aunt Prudence does not, and the Major acts as if I had committed some dreadful crime.

"I did not know that the Indians would not let any one punish their children, how could I? Of course though my not knowing about their customs will not be anything in my favor with the Indians, and I know this minute if I had such a tempest of anger in me as I did then, I would punish them again, and that's all there is to it."

Welch smiled his sorrowful approval at her, while he wagged his head solemnly.

"If I'm scalped to-night, I'll die saying I lost my hair in a good cause," he returned, soberly, rubbing his bald head in grim appreciation of his first attempt to be humorous.

"Oh, Mr. Welch, I am so exceedingly glad the Lord has raised up still another friend for me," Joan breathed, fervently, and almost dazzled the poor man with the radiance of the smile she flashed at him.

"The Major has influence with the Indians, perhaps he will be able to make them view the matter reasonably," Lois advanced, hopefully.

"Yes, the Major has influence," Welch grunted, "so has the devil," he added, in an undertone.

Welch's reference to his Satanic Majesty won

from Prudence a cold smile that nearly froze him, so he told Martha afterward, but the smile Lois flashed him was warm and approving.

"Aunt Prudence does not generally approve of my religious views," Joan said, in a steady little voice, "but I think it's a very appropriate time for us all to have the same religious views for a few minutes. Let us pray over the matter here and now—all of us together, for you know there is a promise to answer the prayers of the two or three gathered together in His name. I am sure that the Lord knows I am anxious to take all the anger of the Indians to myself; if they are so angry they must take their mad out on some one. Still, I am sure, if we ask Him in the right spirit, He will soften their hearts, for they are also His children."

"Well, I never!" Prudence exclaimed, as Joan followed her words, by flinging herself on her knees in front of Rodney's chair.

"I never prayed before any one in my life," Welch said, mournfully, "but I'll do it now if it kills me," and he went stiffly down by his chair, while Lois, with a little tremulous smile, knelt beside Joan.

Joan's vibrant voice breathed the first prayer, and it was such a mixture of censure for the extreme anger she had in her heart when she pun-

ished the children, coupled as it was with the plea that she could not do otherwise than she had, that even Prudence's thin lips jerked with flickering smiles as she, too, knelt beside her chair. She did not want to kneel, but the voice of the child compelled her, and when Sam Welch and Lois had prayed a prayer that was all for the safety of the child, Prudence also prayed, and while the mumbled words of her prayer were intelligible only to the recording angel, the prayer was not all for herself.

Rodney entered the room just as the odd quartette arose from their knees.

"The Major will see the chief, the uncle of the children," he announced, with forced cheerfulness. "It will all come out all right, little girl," he said, tenderly, as he drew Joan to him. "The Indians are incensed because of the unusual punishment of the children, but the children themselves are not angry, which is good for our cause, and beside that the Indians know better than to harm a white person now. Anyway, there are not enough Indians here to bother us," he added.

"That's the talk," Welch exclaimed, with an enthusiasm that served to cover from all but himself his embarrassment over the recent prayer event.

Yet Sam Welch, keen man of the desert that he was, knew that the Indians, if they were as in-

censed as he feared they were, could in a few hours wipe out the white settlers in the little village.

There were more than a hundred grown Indians in the Reservation. In the white village there were about fifty white people, half of them too weak to fight if there were any weapons among them to fight with, and Welch doubted if there were ten weapons owned by the white settlers, while he secretly knew that the Major had recently supplied the Indians with a number of contraband arms at a snug profit to himself.

"By the way, you have a corral, have you not?" Rodney asked, casually, as Welch arose, saying, "I 'low I'd better be moving toward home; Martha will have dinner ready."

"Yes, why?" Welch demanded, quickly.

Rodney's face flushed under the man's keen scrutiny. "Oh, I just bought the Major's black saddle horse," he answered, avoiding the other man's eyes.

"Just so," Welch returned, musingly.

"Why, Rodney, why did you buy a horse, now of all times?" Prudence exclaimed, irritably.

"Oh, I'll want one to ride later on, Aunt Prudence, and now is as good a time as ever to buy one. The Major let me have his black beauty at a bargain."

"A bargain to himself, no doubt," Welch muttered between his teeth. Both he and Lois were shrewd enough to know that the Major was going to use his influence with the Indians for the consideration Rodney gave him for the black horse, unusually beautiful, but of well-known disagreeable temper.

That the Major had not openly bargained with Rodney, Welch also shrewdly guessed.

The fact was, the big black horse changed hands at an exorbitant price, with less words being directly spoken than are usually used in such exchanges of ownership of horses.

The Major had made a pompous speech, much filled with praise of himself and his influence over the Indians, which ended with the sudden seemingly irrelevant remark, "I have a horse that will about suit you, my boy."

"I am willing to buy the horse, Major, if that will insure Joan's safety now and in the future as far as regards this episode," Rodney returned, with a direct searching look.

"You have my hand on it that the Indians will not harm a hair of the child's head after I am through with them, now or in the future, as far as this episode is concerned."

The Major held out his hand, and while Rodney

hated to touch it, he dared not openly show his disgust, so allowed the Major to pump his arm up and down until it ached.

"Now about the horse, my boy," the Major chuckled. "You'll get full value out of it."

"Very well, Major, what do you ask for the horse? I will take him."

The Major named a price that would have shaken the composure of most men, but Rodney took it so coolly that the Major reviled himself all the way over to Pedro's cottage because he had not doubled the amount, although the price paid him would have bought a famous racehorse.

"Still," the Major mused, complacently, as he neared Pedro's. "There will be a handsome profit for me. A little fire water for Pedro, coupled with a few discreet remarks about his sinecure as chief—he owes it all to me—will settle the affair." Just as the Major tapped with his cane on Pedro's door, Chawa came around the corner of the house, and with a grin of contempt at the Major, sped across the Reservation and the road to Rodney's cottage. He approached the cottage as stealthily as could have his great-grandfather, Fighting Wolf, and silently laid a gaudy bow and a half-dozen beautifully chipped flint-tipped arrows beside it.

"Damn," the Major muttered under his breath, as Chawa sped past him. Then his face brightened as he began to plan the powwow for the night . . . there must be a powwow, he mused . . . to properly impress Joan with the seriousness of her offense. He even determined to give Marie, the mother of Flying Eagle and Marina, a bolt of bright-hued calico. Past master of art at such fixing of the Indians was the Major.

When Welch and Lois started for home, Lois found Chawa's peace-offering in front of the door.

"Here is an offering of love and faith from Mona," Lois called, gayly. "Mona told me one day that a present of a bow and six arrows meant love and peace to the one who received the gift."

Welch wagged his head solemnly, but said nothing. He had seen the stealthy giver, and knew it was not Mona.

Joan gathered the gift to her with a little cry of Joy. "How like Mona to give them to me now," she cried.

When Mona slipped over to Joan's just before the powwow that evening, Joan began to thank her for the bow and arrows, but Mona denied the gift and her eyes, when she turned to leave her white friend, were grave and troubled. She knew from

whom the gift came, and it troubled her even more than had the events of the morning.

The Indian matures early, and Mona understood the look she had caught in Chawa's flashing eyes as he peered in at the window that morning.

CHAPTER IX

LOIS had but one pupil that afternoon, and that one Joan. Rodney accompanied his ward. He could not bear to have the child out of his sight an instant, and for the first time in his life felt a great fear—fear for the beloved child.

He knew that even then the versatile Major was holding a powwow with Pedro, and from what he knew of the man he was confident that Joan's safety was assured the instant he gave to the greedy Major the price of that safety; still he was troubled. Joan meant more to him than life itself. He smiled at her skipping along beside him. Joan seemed to have forgotten the events of the morning. Not since the odd prayer service had a shadow of doubt assailed her about the outcome of the affair. Joan's faith in the Infinite was something sublime. And every now and then her laugh rang out like the ripple of deep water kissed by the sun and wind.

When Rodney, Lois, and the child started home in the late afternoon, they found the Major awaiting them at the door. The Major pointed tri-

umphantly to a solar bow that hung in the sky over the Springs.

"Nothing could have been better for our cause, my boy," he said, unctuously, as he patted Rodney's shoulder. "That shower was worth a great deal to us, my boy, a great deal. The Indians will combine their worship of the rainbow with the council powwow to-night and all will go as merrily as we could ask. But never touch an Indian child again, young lady," he admonished Joan, with a pudgy forefinger under her chin.

Joan shrank back from him, and her eyes flashed fire as she slipped her hand in Lois's with a swift little movement that spoke as plainly as could words that she would fight her beloved teacher's battles every day in the year if need be.

"I do not believe there will be occasion for a repetition of to-day's trouble," Rodney said, stiffly.

The Major changed the subject. "I see you have the colt all ready." He waved a fat hand toward Sam Welch's corral, where the big black beauty was pawing angrily.

"Yes, and he is a beauty, Major. I am very glad I own him," Rodney answered, dryly. "I shall get one of the Indians to break him."

"No need, my boy, no need; he is as gentle as a kitten." The Major tapped his finger-tips to-

gether impressively. "As gentle as a kitten, suh."

"As gentle as some kittens, no doubt, Major," Rodney returned, pleasantly.

Rodney had the horse's reputation from Welch. The black beauty had crippled three Indians already and was yet unconquered.

"I'll leave you now," Lois said, with a flash of amusement in her dark eyes. She stooped and kissed Joan, and impulsively held out her hand to Rodney. The Major she ignored or at best included him in the brief, "I'm going in to cheer up Mr. Arth," as she turned into Arth's yard.

The Major accompanied Rodney and Joan home, explaining impressively and at great length his trying time with the Indian chief, Pedro, before he could secure a promise of peace to all the pale faces, and peace and safety for Joan.

At the cottage he repeated the harangue, and Prudence believed every word of it. The Major held all the winning cards in the odd love affair that evening.

"It's a heathenish country anyway," Prudence said at last. "Think of a rain like we had this afternoon and the ground perfectly dry now. It is fit only for the Indians here. I am surprised that a man like you, Major, should keep on living here."

"My lungs brought me here, dear lady, just as

the dear boy's brought him. I stayed on because I became interested in my red brethren," he continued, with his hand on where his heart should have been. "Then my wife passed away and left me desolate." He wiped his eyes with a great white silk handkerchief. "But now life is beginning to brighten for me," he said, pompously, with a meaning look at Prudence, as he emerged from behind the handkerchief.

There was silence for a time. A heavy impressive silence during which the face of Prudence reddened and paled a number of times. Joan at last slipped out on the porch where she was joined by Mona. Rodney followed Joan to the door and requested her to remain in the yard. A wonderful smile brightened Mona's face and lurked in her great gray eyes as she flashed an approving glance at Rodney. In an instant the smile was gone and her eyes were steady, serious, inscrutable.

She came close to Rodney, and spoke quickly, in a low voice.

"Chawa very fierce—he grown now same as you—I love him, he is my brother, but I love the pale-face child more. She make Mona very happy here." She placed her hand on her heart.

"You love her much." Rodney's eyes followed hers to Joan, her bright head bent over the gift of

Chawa. Unconsciously Rodney had been led out of Joan's hearing by the little half-breed.

"Those Chawa's gifts." Mona pointed to the bow and arrows. "He, Chawa, love Joan—he fight to win her.—In his veins flows the blood of the great fighting chief, Fighting Wolf. Chawa not of my father's people, no, no, he all of the red blood. We must watch Chawa—do not think he is child—Chawa is not—he as grown as you." Her voice trembled, and her eyes were troubled and grave. "You watch, too, that Major man in there. I hate him," she said, vehemently, her voice contemptuous and raspy with hate. "He give Pedro much fire-water to-day. He make enemy of all for her, if he could. He hates her as I hate him, but I love her; I, Mona, stand ready to give my life for my white friend. So have I sworn by the Sun and Moon gods—so have I declared at the feet of my brother, the palms, on the spot where blows the dust gathered by the four winds, and I, Mona, keep my word."

She spoke quite simply, yet her voice was vibrant with truth, and Rodney knew that she did not speak lightly.

Mona was only two years older than Joan, but Joan was a child and Mona stood on the invisible border line between childhood and womanhood.

"What a magnificent creature of fire and dew she is!" Rodney mused, as he watched the changing lights in the great dark eyes.

"I glad you love her. You take her to you forever some day as my white father took my dark mother. She loves you, love for love," she said, softly, a note of joy blended with a note of exquisite renunciation in the liquid voice, and suddenly she had crossed the invisible border line, and a woman stood before the man, and for one instant it was given him to read the words of a great love that were written in the eyes wonderfully soft now and misty with love and pain and renunciation. Then the eyes were once more grave, inscrutable.

"I go now," she said, gravely. "You need not fear for the child we both love; I, Mona, watch her." She smiled gravely as she turned to leave the man, who stood silent, spellbound.

With an effort Rodney pulled himself together and said, huskily, "I thank you, Mona, and I trust you with the child dearer to me than life."

The man never forgot the smile the girl-woman flashed at him.

"Come, Joan, Mona is going," Rodney called. Joan came joyously, and threw her arms caressingly about Mona.

Joan had been weaving a fanciful story about

the bow and arrows and a beautiful princess, to whom they were given. She fancied the beautiful princess going forth from her own country to a strange land to rescue her lover, a handsome prince, who had been stolen by a giant and imprisoned in a great cave in the strange land, and as usual, when weaving tales, had forgotten the existence of all beside her fancy. To her the bow and arrows were magic things and the nucleus of many a fanciful tale.

Mona returned Joan's embrace with a tender, protective one, and Rodney smiled happily at the picture they made there in the early twilight.

"I go now," Mona said at last. "You come to Mr. Arth's to-night—my mother's people have dance to-night just across from his place—you both enjoy it. You come?" she asked directly of Rodney. "You see something if you do, also you bring her, that stern woman inside, she see much do her good."

Rodney laughed. "Yes, Mona, we will come."

"Good," Mona said, softly, and was gone.

"Wonder what Aunt Prudence will see that will do her good," he mused, as he entered the cottage, his arm about Joan.

That the Major had been pressing his suit when they entered was very apparent by Prudence's em-

barrassment and the Major's flash of anger when Rodney calmly took his seat and began talking about the coming powwow. "I am going," he said, cheerfully, ignoring the Major's scowls.

"You'd better stay home," the Major growled, as he mopped his forehead. Prudence had made it very difficult for him to propose to her, and now the interruption at the most crucial moment was very trying. The Major was pardonable for some of his spleen.

"Oh, yes, I am going," Rodney repeated, calmly, enjoying the Major's discomfiture. "I think Aunt Prudence will enjoy it. She will have to go or be left alone, and I am sure she will prefer going."

"Are you going, Major?" Prudence asked, timidly.

"Yes—er—no, that is I have a business engagement a little later, dear lady, or I would gladly come and stay with you, if your nephew is not considerate enough to do so."

Prudence flushed painfully. She had a sense of having said something unmaidenly.

"I will go with Rodney, Major," she said, stiffly.

"Go on and get ready, Aunt Prue," Rodney said, cheerfully. "Perhaps we may see you at the dance, Major." Rodney turned to the Major. The

Major's eyes flashed malevolently as he gnawed at his long mustache.

"Sorry, but you will not," he said, stiffly, just as Prudence returned to the room, ready to accompany Rodney and Joan. "I have to go to the station to-night to meet the late freight," the Major lied, calmly.

"I fancy, Mona, girl, that I owe you a debt of gratitude in that direction," Rodney mused, as he and Joan followed Prudence and the Major down the sandy road to Arth's cottage, where most of the white people were already gathered to witness the Indian rites.

The Major left them just before the cottage was reached.

"Damn Pedro," he growled, as he went across the road toward the Reservation. "Damn him," he jerked out again, as he neared Pedro's cottage. "Why in thunder did he insist on me being there." As he knocked on the door with his cane, he shrugged his shoulders and grunted philosophically. "No use to grunt about it. I can push Pedro just so far. Damn it all, I'll have to grin and do it, but if that young cuss had stayed out five minutes longer I would have had the old gal's word."

He banged the door again impatiently. It opened and the darkness of the room swallowed him up.

The calm desert moon looked down upon a strange scene that night, but one upon which it had looked many, many times.

Across from Arth's cottage lay the open desert, and there the Indians gathered for their sacred dance to the rainbow, symbol of the love of the Sun and Moon gods for their Earth-born children.

Seven great fires marked the boundaries of a great clearing. Superstitious reverence to the seven rainbows of the ancient days demanded this setting.

The glow of the fires threw into flickering relief the Indians gathered in one serpentine wave within the boundary limits.

With a start, Rodney recognized that the man at the end of the line nearest the road was not an Indian, although he was wrapped in a blanket as were the Indians, but his rotundity suggested the Major.

He startled the group about him by suddenly giving a shrill whistle. The man at the end of the line half turned for just an instant, and the man was the Major.

Without question the Major had influence over the Indians of Rainbow Springs, and equally unquestionable was the fact that even Prudence had recognized the Major.

Beyond the fires lay the desert serene and peace-

ful, majestic in its purple shadows and vast silence. In the midst of the circle was a giant cacti "Cereus Giganteus," with more than a dozen columns twenty feet or more in height flanking the main body.

On the faces of all the Indians was a superstitious expression that was almost fanatically dangerous. The end man kept his face hidden in the folds of his blanket, while he wondered who had emitted that shrill whistle and if he had turned his face far enough to be visible to the white people across the road. It was a subject to ponder over.

Suddenly the solemn stillness of the night was broken by a low humming murmur that came from the throats of the Indians. At first it was faint and low, characterless, but it began to swell and gain in power as a stream of water swells and grows in force as it nears the sea.

As the chanting gained in volume and musical character the faces of the Indians grew distorted with their wild exertions. A distinct and majestic harmony was now manifest in the intonating sound and at the close of several high bird-like calls, from the throats of the women, seven of the men separated themselves from the serpentine line, and began to dance about the cacti, while the voices of the singers rose and fell in plaintive, harmonic cadences.

The seven were medicine men, and as the dance grew wilder they threw offerings of beads and birds and lizards at the base of the giant cacti, and an untamed note crept into the voices of them all, while fiercer and wilder grew the antics of the seven medicine men capering about the giant cacti.

Rodney noticed with a sense of relief that the Major was not dancing with the Indians, but was huddled in his blanket in the shadows.

The fires burned fiercer now, and at a sign from one of the medicine men a slight, dark figure left the far end of the line of dancers.

The youth stood for a moment in bold relief against the background of dancing fire, and in that moment Rodney recognized Chawa, the brother of Mona. There was no trace now of the white blood that flowed in the veins of the half-breed lad. Indian, all Indian, was Chawa as he stood there, his patrician blood showing in every lineament of his lithe body.

Rodney could not but admire that sinewy form, as lithe and graceful as a panther, yet he instinctively drew Joan close to him, as he suddenly recalled the words of Mona.

Chawa swept the dancers with a haughty glance, before he advanced to the nearest burning heap and lighted a torch that lay beside it.

With the burning torch in his hand, he ran swiftly to the six remaining heaps of fire and thrust the burning brand into the flames of each, then advanced toward the giant cacti with slow and graceful contortions of his perfect body clad only in a breechcloth of tawny lion-skin.

The seven medicine men formed a circle about the cacti and raised their voices in a howling, discordant cry to the Sun and Moon gods to witness the burning of their offerings.

Chawa held the burning torch for an instant against the base of the giant cacti, and a fitful, flickering flame began to play about it.

The seven medicine men broke their circle and began to dance slowly backward until they reached the serpentine line of Indians, now motionless.

For a time the flames flickered about the trunk of the cacti; then with a crackling noise ran fiercely up the ribbed columns, seeking and burning all the spines thereon.

As the flames crept higher, in their leaping way to the tops of the columns, the Indians began to dance again, swaying with rhythmic movements indescribably graceful.

As the flames began to die out, the chanting grew softer and softer, until it was only a low musical whisper.

The savage light faded from the faces of all but Chawa. Chawa's face was still savage, his eyes flashing, his head held high. Unlike the others he did not feel the presence of the Sun and Moon gods, neither did he linger with them until all the fires died out and the midnight wind came in answer to the prayers of the medicine men to scatter to the ends of the earth the ashes of the homage fires.

Neither did Chawa appear to that sacred rite that followed the dance and to which no white man has ever been a witness.

Next day Joan found a bright Indian basket on her side of the desk when she and Mona slipped into their seat.

She turned to Mona, a happy light in her luminous eyes, to find Mona regarding her with a troubled look.

"I did not bring it, little friend," Mona said, gravely.

"Oh, you dear, dear Mona, you love to surprise me and make things mysterious," Joan cried, with a warm kiss on Mona's red lips. "I thought when we first went to the Cave of Rest that you were not imaginative, even though I knew we were meant for lifelong friends the instant I saw you, but you are imaginative, Mona, dear, and everything else that makes you perfectly adorable."

"I did not bring it, little friend," Mona repeated, but Joan only hugged her the more warmly, and refused to believe otherwise.

Mona did not tell Joan the gift was the gift of Chawa; that would have been disloyal to her brother, and Mona was true to Chawa, even though she did not understand him and was determined to protect her white friend from him.

No one understood Chawa in the weeks that followed. He appeared at school one morning and behaved himself perfectly all that day, and after that he attended the school regularly. He was as intelligent as he was wild and beautiful. Lois, after she began to have faith in his regeneration, took a great pride in his rapid advancement.

Almost every morning there was a gift of some kind for Joan. After a time Joan was forced to believe the gifts were not from Mona, but this only added to the enjoyment she took in their mysterious appearance each morning. She never once connected the gifts with Chawa, for not once during the weeks he attended school did Chawa speak to Joan. But Chawa, unknown to Joan, spent many minutes looking at the white child when she was lost in study, and the light in his eyes grew more intense each day, and Mona grew more and more troubled

until at last she sought Rodney, and warned him that Chawa was getting restless, and some day Rodney would awaken to find Joan gone—spirited away. "The Major will help Chawa," she added, as she turned to leave the startled man. "If I were you I'd see my uncle, Pedro. For much money he will send Chawa to a school Chawa cannot leave for as long a time as you wish."

Like a flash she vanished as silently and noiselessly as she had come, and Rodney set out for Pedro's.

After a long talk there was the passing of money from a fine white hand to a dirty red one. The following morning Chawa disappeared from Rainbow Springs. Pedro had promised that Chawa would remain away three years. Rodney hoped by that time to be able to leave Rainbow Springs in perfect health.

With the going of Chawa no more gifts appeared on Joan's desk, and finally Joan connected their absence with Chawa. She never mentioned her discovery to any one, but the gifts lost their magic power to charm her, for Joan could never forget the sight of her beloved teacher when Chawa threw the snake in her face.

The two girls and the gold-coated collie spent many happy hours in the Cave of Rest in the fairy

world to which only the young and innocent have the key.

One memorable day Mona took Joan to see her grandmother, the ancient Cecilia.

The sun beat down on the Indian village that April day with rare intensity.

The shack where Mona lived with her grandmother was less than two city blocks from the cottage where Joan lived, but Joan had never been inside the Reservation since the first morning at the Springs, and then she had not gone fifty yards before Prudence called her back.

Mona's face flushed sensitively as they neared her home, but Joan, chattering animatedly as usual beside her, did not notice her embarrassment.

"My grandmother," Mona announced, stoically, as they turned the corner of the shack and came upon Cecilia lying flat upon her back under the broiling sun.

In lieu of a pillow the ancient one's head rested on an upturned tin pan, and her shrunken body was bare save for a short skirt that scarce reached to her knees.

Cecilia knew but few words of English, but she did know that Joan was the friend Mona had told her much about—she knew that Mona idolized the white child; she worshipped Mona, so she raised

herself to a sitting posture and grunted an amiable "How do?"

Joan took her outstretched bony hand, and shook it cordially. Mona watched her little friend closely, but her keen eyes could not detect the shiver of repulsion that ran through Joan and was intensified by the sight of the filthy pipe clutched tight between the toothless gums of the old squaw, her lips curled back in a welcoming grin.

"I am well, thank you, and I hope you are enjoying good health," Joan returned, in answer to Cecilia's "How do?"

The manner of the child evidently pleased the ancient one, for she hunched herself up into a more comfortable position, and took the pipe from her mouth, extending it to Joan with the brief, "We friends—smoke—Cecilia's love pipe."

Mona spoke rapidly to her grandmother in the low, not unmusical, dialect of the tribe, pleading the old squaw not to force the pipe upon her friend, but the squaw was obdurate.

"Smoke!" she demanded. "Smoke with Cecilia."

Seeing the troubled look in Mona's eyes, Joan squatted down beside Cecilia. She had read about the "pipe of peace" of the Indians, and suddenly determined to smoke it with Cecilia.

"It is all right, Mona," she said, with a trace of eagerness in her vibrant voice. "I am sure the experience will amply repay me. In after years, when you and I are grown and in a beautiful home of our own, it will be a great pleasure to look back on this day. I assure you, Mona, I shall revel in smoking the 'pipe of peace' with your grandmother. It is thrilling just to think about it."

Cecilia did not in the least understand Joan's rapid speech, but there was no mistaking the sincerity written in every line of that bright, expressive face.

Even Mona understood that her friend was truly enjoying the thoroughness of her abasement in making a call on a full-blooded Indian squaw.

Joan beamed upon Cecilia as she thrust the dirty pipe between her teeth, and puffed tentatively at it.

Mona watched her in dismay. There was a light in Joan's eyes that warned her that it was useless to interfere with her friend while her mind was making a flight to realms unknown. So she watched her grandmother and Joan smoke the pipe turn about until the old squaw signified by a contented grunt that the smoke session was at an end.

With another grunt Cecilia lay back down with

her head on the tin pan, and soon began to snore contentedly, drifting asleep with the quickness and ease of the very young or very old.

Joan struggled weakly to her feet.

"I am very dizzy, Mona," she said, in a weak little voice. Her face was drawn and gray.

"I assure you, though, that I am very happy to have smoked with your grandmother. I am sure she enjoyed it. I feel very sick, but although my faith is shaken in Miss Warren's belief just as she believed it, still I shall try to believe this is only imagination. It may even help me to repeat the Scientific Statement of Life—'There is no life, truth, intelligence nor substance in matter,' Mona dear. 'All is Infinite Mind and its Infinite manifestations,' so I cannot feel badly, Mona, dear, even though error is trying to make me believe otherwise. Your grandmother smokes that pipe right along with a perfectly harmonious feeling, and why should not the result be the same in my case. I smoked the pipe to please her, but oh, Mona, dear, let us get home to Rodney quickly."

She staggered weakly as they started across the road. Mona supported her wavering footsteps while a band tightened about her heart. She had promised the beautiful white man, as she called Rodney, to care for the child he loved, and now

she was bringing that child home with a wild mind.

Very bravely Joan fought the almost overpowering nausea that assailed her, until the cottage door was reached, but when Rodney opened the door, she crumpled up in a weak little heap at his feet, crying "Oh, Rodney! Rodney!"

"What is the matter?" Rodney turned to Mona, his voice quivering with anger and anxiety.

Mona quickly and vividly recounted their visit to her grandmother Cecilia.

Rodney could not refrain from smiling at Mona's dramatic sketch of the smoke session, even though Joan hung limp in his arms as he carried her into her room.

Rodney had gone through the same sickness in boyhood, and knew that it was not necessarily dangerous.

He called Prudence, and Prudence undressed Joan almost tenderly; then plunged her feet into the tub of hot water she had Mona bring her from the kitchen. And to the credit of Prudence be it said, she gave thanks that the boiling water was on the stove ready for a chicken she had intended to dress for supper that night.

In an hour Joan was almost herself again. She was still weak and dizzy when she tried to stand on

her feet, and Prudence, a tender note in her voice Rodney had never heard before, decreed that Joan should have her supper in bed.

Joan had a happy hour after supper, for Lois came over then, and she and Mona each held a moist little hand in theirs, while Prudence looked on with a grim yet not unkind smile.

Joan never regretted smoking the "pipe of peace" with the ancient Cecilia, indeed she was heartily glad she had done so when a week later Cecilia's spirit went to join the spirits of her ancestors in the great beyond.

CHAPTER X

WILLIAM ARTH grew very fond of Joan during the long winter months. Every morning she came to his cottage like a ray of sunshine. The brightness of the hour she spent with him lingered with him all the weary day and in the long, sleepless hours of the night the thought of her was the anchor upon which he rested.

Arth had been complaining for some days, and one night late in April he suffered from an acute attack of lung congestion, and to Joan his condition was alarming. He tried to quiet Joan's fear when, as was her custom, she ran over in the early twilight to bid him good-night.

"We'll try to believe you are not sick at all," she said, with forced brightness. "You repeat the Ninety-first Psalm while I run over to the house for a minute. I'll come back." She answered the wistful look in the sick man's eyes.

She ran all the way up the sandy road to the Major's, and dashed into the Major's presence without the formality of knocking for admission.

"I want to use your telephone immediately," she cried. "I want to call the hermit doctor for Mr. Arth."

"The telephone is out of order," the Major growled, as Joan dashed across the room to it.

If Joan heard, there was no sign of it manifested by her movements. She assured herself that the telephone was indeed useless, and was off like a flash before the Major could make a fittingly scathing remark about her intrusion. This disgusted the Major greatly, and he settled back in his chair, scowling at the telephone—the only one at the Springs. At last his beady eyes gleamed with an unholy light. It would be impossible to secure the service of the hermit doctor, who lived all alone at a place he called "Seven Pine Lodge" because of the seven great pines that towered sentinel-like over his snug little cottage on the ridge of the mountain. Seven Pine Lodge was twelve miles from Rainbow Springs. The doctor was a queer character, a man who lived absolutely alone, but a man nevertheless who was ever ready to answer the call of any one ill. The Major hated Arth for the simple reason that Arth lived in one of Sam Welch's cottages, and he took a grim joy in the thought that on the morrow one of Welch's cottages might be vacant.

Rodney was starting a fire in the huge fireplace in the living-room, for the nights were cool, when Joan dashed in.

"We'll have to get a doctor for Mr. Arth quicker than lightning," Joan cried, excitedly, her face flushed with excitement.

"What is the matter?" Rodney demanded, his eyes lighting with the love light that always came to them at sight of Joan.

"He has lung fever or pneumonia very bad, and he'll have to get better mighty quick or die. I am sure if Miss Warren was here even she would have to admit that something more than mortal mind is the matter with him; but oh, I do wish she was here to make one of her demonstrations over him!"

"What!" Rodney gasped, still struggling with the refractory fire.

"I've been to the Major's to telephone the hermit doctor. You know Mr. Welch said the other day 'the hermit doctor is always ready to come to any one sick,' but the Major's 'phone is out of order, and now I'll pin all my faith on God and Mona."

The fire on the hearth began to crackle and dance merrily, giving Joan's eager little face a witch-like radiance.

Rodney stood up and faced her, his eyes reflecting the light of her face. "Little witch girl, count

on me," he said, with a smile. "I'll go over and see the poor chap."

"Well, but we must hurry," Joan panted, as she started out the door. "I'm going for Mona now," she flung over her shoulder. "I am glad you are going to him, I know you are not well, either, but some one of age and discretion should be with him now."

"What ever is the matter, Joan?" Prudence demanded. Prudence had come in the room so quietly that neither Rodney nor the excited child had heard her.

Joan paused an instant in the doorway. "It's Mr. Arth, Aunt Prudence. Please go over to see him. He needs a woman with him now if any one ever did."

"Well, I never!" Prudence gasped, as Joan disappeared in the shadows of a night when the moon rises late.

"She has gone for Mona," Rodney said, quietly, as he went into the other room for his hat and coat.

"Humph!" Prudence grunted, as she carefully turned down the light in the living-room. "Rodney is a perfect lunatic. Joan can do as she pleases with him, but if I had my way she'd catch it good and plenty for going over to that Indian's after night. Humph!"

Joan was as unceremonious in her entrance to Mona's room as she had been at the Major's. Mona had lived with her uncle, the chief, ever since the death of Cecilia, and Joan knew Mona's room—a room shared with Flying Eagle and Marina, so lost no time in climbing in through the open window—a window open perforce because it was but a hole in the wall.

Mona was alone. She looked up with a start when Joan stood panting before her."

"What is it, little friend?" she asked, in her low, musical voice.

"Mona! Mona! You are the only one who can save Mr. Arth," Joan panted. "He is very, very sick, and the Major's telephone is out of order. Only one of your people can save him now. Some one must go for the hermit doctor and get him here quickly or Mr. Arth will die, and we can't stand that, Mona, dear. You will go for the doctor, won't you, Mona, dear? I hate to ask you to go, but the Lord of Hosts will be with you, Mona, and you will be going in His cause, for you will go through love, Mona, dear. I would go if I only knew the way, but I don't, and I know you said one day you had been there. I will stay with Mr. Arth and pray the dear God to help me do something for him while you are gone."

"I go," Mona said, simply. Then a troubled look came into her dark eyes. "I no have way," she said, plaintively. "My uncle he turn all the ponies out to-night. It might take me hours to catch one. Mr. Welch's team go to Thermal, you know, with Miss Reeves and his sister. And the Major's horses turned out with my uncle's. There is nothing left for Mona to ride."

For just an instant Joan's eyes reflected the troubled look in Mona's, then they flashed with inspired light.

"Mona! Mona! There is King Solomon," she cried. King Solomon was Joan's name for the wild beauty Rodney had purchased from the Major.

Almost immediately the exalted light in her eyes was followed by a veil of disappointment. "But he is impossible, I suppose," she sighed. "You could not ride him."

Mona drew herself up with a certain savage regalness. "I ride heem . . . I ride more wild than heem many times." She spread out her hands. "I go now, my friend. Haste is needed." Mona's haste was an almost incredible haste. In a marvelously short time she had bridled King Solomon and was off like a flash across the desert, lying in silent majesty under an inky sky lavishly studded with glittering star jewels.

Mona's dark eyes, as she clung to the silky coat of the black horse, were brilliant with a wonderful tender light, for the touch of Joan's loving parting kiss was still sweet upon her lips.

Prudence accompanied Rodney to Arth's. When Arth, tossing upon his bed, heard her voice, he straightened up with a heroic effort. "I'll be all right in the morning," he said, in answer to her stiff offer to do something for him.

"Ginger tea is good—I'll make you some, if you wish it," Prudence offered, still standing in the doorway. She had never been in Arth's cottage, and despite the many sick people in the village, she had neither sympathy nor understanding for any of them.

She had never been seriously sick a day in her life, and this disease was something she would have been ashamed to acknowledge had she been afflicted with it.

"You are very kind," Arth smiled, with an effort, "but I will get along nicely, thank you."

"I'll stay with Arth a while—you might as well go back home, Aunt Prue," Rodney said at last. His aunt still stood in the doorway, undecided what to do, and Arth's efforts to suppress his great pain became more evident each passing minute.

"I am sure I am more than willing to do something," Prudence hesitated.

"Thank you, but I shall be all right in the morning," Arth returned, weakly, a flicker of a smile playing about his pain-drawn mouth.

The woman meant well, he knew, and because she was Rodney's aunt he would exert his last lingering bit of strength to be polite to her. Nevertheless he groaned in relief, as her well-meaning footsteps died away.

"Did you do something for him?" Joan panted, as she came dashing back from seeing Mona off.

Prudence was just turning down the road toward home.

"No, I do not think he is very sick; he would not let me do anything for him," Prudence answered. "Come on home to bed, Joan, and don't worry yourself. It is nearly nine o'clock. I declare, I never did see such a child."

"You can go on home to bed, Aunt Prudence. I will not, until something is done for poor Mr. Arth. I'll do all I can for him. Rodney will help me, and we will trust in God to help him over this attack. Oh, how I wish it were not Friday night and Miss Reeves gone!" Lois had taken Martha home with her that afternoon to remain until late

Sunday, and as it happened there was no other woman in the village to whom Joan could appeal.

"Well, you are Rodney's affair, not mine, as I have said before, and if he wants to let you act like this, I have nothing more to say. As for myself, I shall go on home to bed, where all sensible people ought to be. If your Miss Reeves were here she would do the same. I offered to make the man some ginger tea, and he would not have it," Prudence sniffed.

"Oh, Aunt Prudence, don't you know you don't want to offer to do things for sick people—you simply want to go ahead and do them!"

"Well, Miss Smarty, go ahead and do things," Prudence snorted, "but if I had the right I'd march you home to bed, and keep you there until you were different," she added, grimly.

Joan's eyes flashed, but she said nothing. Prudence grunted and stalked home with her head high in the air. She was shivering all over with the fear that an Indian might spring upon her and carve her thin tresses from her head.

Joan watched the retreating shadowy bulk of the woman for an instant, then with a little catch in her breath dashed back to the sick man's cottage. She gave one look at Arth, then turned to Rodney.

"I'll make a fire and put some water on to boil,

Rodney, while you go to the Major's and get a can of antiphlogistine from him. I saw several cans on that shelf back of the telephone. Mrs. Brown used to use whole stacks of it on Mr. Brown when he was like that." She nodded over her shoulder at Arth.

"All right, little girl." Rodney tip-tilted the determined little chin with his long fingers, and looked down into the glowing face while he said softly to himself,—

"God grant that she is always as she is now." He stooped and kissed the flushed cheeks, and hurried off to the Major's.

"I've fixed it for Mr. Brown lots of times," Joan said, briskly, as she set the can of antiphlogistine in the pan of water, boiling merrily by the time Rodney returned. From the dresser drawer she took a pillow case, calmly ripped it open, and tore it into two pieces suitable for her use. "I am sure Mr. Welch will be glad I took one of his pillow slips for Mr. Arth," she added, as she tore the slip.

"If he is not, we will buy him another one in place of this one." Rodney smiled at the vivid little face.

"I am sure you will make it all right, Rodney," Joan said, briskly, as she covered the sick man's

chest, back, and front with a lavish coating of the hot paste.

Arth smiled at Rodney while the child patted and fixed him comfortably.

"What now?" he asked, with a gleam of mirth in his eyes, as Joan brought a basin of fresh tepid water to the bed.

"I'll bathe you, and your fever will go down some," she answered, as she began to sponge the man's burning face.

"Mona has gone for the hermit doctor," she added, tersely.

Arth smiled and closed his eyes. For the first time in hours he was almost free from pain.

Rodney watched the child with the light of a great love in his eyes. His dream of the early Christmas morning had come true. He still loved his violin, but his love for Joan was so much greater that the very overwhelming volume of it made him catch his breath sharply. Into his eyes came an almost holy light, and on his face was the rapt look with which the devotee is pictured.

After a time Arth slept fitfully.

Rodney went outside and began to pace slowly up and down in front of the cottage.

Joan came out after a while and slipped her hand in his.

"Is he worse?" Rodney asked, quickly.

"He is sleeping now, but, Rodney, dear, he could not get worse without dying. I came out to get you to pray with me, Rodney. You remember when I made the Indians mad at me over punishing Flying Eagle and Marina, Aunt Prudence, Mr. Welch, and Lois and I prayed while you were out front talking to the Major, and you know that prayer was answered—so let us pray now, Rodney, out here in the starlight. It seems that the dear God must be very near to us here in this vast beautiful land. Let us pray quick, Rodney."

"All right, little girl." Rodney's voice was very tender.

So they prayed out there on the crusted sand, and when they had finished the late moon was just peeping up over the mountain tops, its silver bars of light laid daintily on the purple veiled mountains.

When Joan went back into the cottage, Arth was awake. She knelt beside him and began to bathe his hot forehead.

"Why are you so good to me—why do you do this for me?" Arth asked, slowly, his voice coming thick and painfully.

Joan dampened her wash-cloth before replying.

"I love to do what I am doing," she said at last. "And, beside that, there is your mother—I have

just seen her silver hair and beautiful tender mother mouth ever since you told me about her. I know she is in heaven, but I believe she is looking down on us now and is being glad some one is with her boy. I can see her smile over you being bathed as she would bathe you were she here. Don't you love to imagine your mother being happy over the things you enjoy? I do, I love to imagine how happy my little mother is since Rodney took me. When I was being handed around, I tried to believe she could not see me, I was so unhappy at times, but now every minute of the day I want her to see me and know how happy I am."

Arth looked up and smiled up into her tender eyes, shining with a radiant faraway look.

"I hope my mother can see me now," he said, softly. "But my mother always kissed me when I was sick," he added, whimsically. "A kiss is a blessed thing, Joan, when it is the pure sweet kiss of love."

Joan bent suddenly and kissed the hot forehead. "That is for your mother," she said, sweetly.

"Dear little girl," Arth murmured, gratefully. It seemed that the kiss *was* the kiss of his mother.

After a while Arth slept again. Suddenly the night grew dark, and the desert seethed and heaved in the throes of a sudden sand-storm.

Rodney came in the cottage looking pale and worn. Rodney was slowly regaining his health, but Rodney was still a sick man.

"Rodney! Rodney! You must lie down," Joan cried, as she looked into his pale face. "Please, please, Rodney, lie down to please me," she pleaded, when he started to sit down beside Arth.

"There is a nice cot in the kitchen," Joan added, as she slipped her hand in his and led the way toward the little rear room. "And you will lie down," she said, firmly.

"But what about my little girl?" Rodney expostulated.

"She is very happy," Joan flashed back, "and will be still happier if Rodney White will lie down."

"You are the boss," Rodney returned, in mock meekness. "Do with me as you will."

Joan smiled at him radiantly when once he was settled on the cot with a comforter over him.

Almost instantly was the exhausted man asleep, and Joan tiptoed into the other room with a happy light in her eyes.

Arth did not speak much as the night wore on. Joan watched and prayed beside him. Not once was her faith in Mona's return with the doctor, and Arth's ultimate recovery shaken in the least.

The wind howled and raged and threw showers

of sand against the windows. It came rushing across the desert, swept round the cottage, and shook it in wanton playfulness. It raced blustering and whistling up the rocky sides of the great mountains, and all the time through a rift in the clouds the desert moon looked calmly down on the desert's dashing concerto.

"Joan, am I going to die?" Arth asked at last. The strength had all gone out of the man; he could no longer battle with the suffocating pains in his lungs.

"I am afraid I will never be able to even imagine that disease is an illusion of mortal mind after this," Joan said, slowly. "The Bible speaks of being sick unto death, and you are really and truly sick, there is no imagination about it, but you've got the grit to pull through, and God answers prayer. Rodney and I prayed most earnestly and faithfully for you to recover while we were out in front of the house before the storm came, and I am sure God will answer that prayer. No, I honestly do not believe you are going to die now," she said, gravely.

Arth turned his face to the wall. Joan saw the shadow of a great fear upon it, so hastened to reassure him.

"Don't worry about it," she said, with assumed cheerfulness. "You'll never die until the Lord of

Hosts is ready for you. When He is ready, you will be glad to go to Him. Just think how beautiful the shining kingdom is. Don't you remember the beautiful psalm? 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me!'"

Arth had heard that verse many times, but now he clung to it desperately, for it brought with it a strange comforting peace he had never felt before. He put his hand over his eyes; his pain was forgotten.

"'Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' Yes, yes," he murmured. "It is all right either way, little girl. I am ready now. I told Rodney, a long time ago, you would help me die like a Christian should, and you will, little girl. 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever,'" he quoted softly; then he smiled brightly. "It's all right now," he murmured, as he slowly repeated the words again, "'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.' Joan," he said, reaching out a burning hand until it rested in hers, "all my letters are in my suit-case. I—I don't want any one to see them but you—until I am well again. You understand?"

Joan nodded.

“And—and if I go to my mother, she shall know that I had loving hands about me at the last, for I shall tell her.”

Joan gently stroked his hand.

“I am not afraid now;” his voice grew steadier. “And Joan, dear little Joan, I owe not being afraid to you. There is one other thing, Joan, I have a wife—she left me, but I was stiff-necked and caused it—I believe she loves me yet. Her address is in my note-book in my vest pocket. Please get my note-book now and keep it until—well until it is all over, and then write to her. Tell her I loved her always. I love her now, oh my God, how I love her!” His voice grew fainter and trailed away. After a minute he spoke again.

“You have my note-book, Joan?”

“Yes,” Joan answered, softly.

“Please give me the little picture out of it—it is *her* picture.”

When Joan gave him the little picture, he clutched it to his lips with a half articulate cry of joy. “Jeanette! Jeanette! My Jeanette,” he said, softly, over and over.

Joan went to the window and looked out on the storm-scourged night. The sand still beat against the windows, but less fiercely than it had an hour ago.

She turned at the sound of Arth's voice.

"Pray, Joan—the Lord's Prayer," he called faintly.

Joan dropped to her knees, "'Our Father who art in Heaven,'" she began, then stopped suddenly. There were hoof-beats coming down the road—coming in mad haste.

"The doctor!" she cried, springing to her feet.

The doctor sprang from his horse, as she opened the door. Mona slipped from the back of King Solomon and flung her arms about Joan's neck.

Joan kissed her in silent rapture; then turned to the doctor.

"Oh, doctor! Doctor!" she cried. "The Lord has been more than good to bring you here in such a storm, but please hurry in. He is sick—really and truly sick. There is no imagination of mortal mind about it."

The hermit doctor smiled at the odd greeting, then hurried in to the sick man.

Arth's breath was coming with a rasping noise, and his head rolled back and forth on the pillow in a vain search for rest.

"Do you want some hot water, doctor?" Joan asked.

The doctor nodded. With his ear at the sick

man's chest, he listened at the labored breathing. His eyes were alert, an indomitable light in them as he went to work.

An hour later Arth was sleeping peacefully, the flush gone from his face, his breath coming less painfully.

Defeated death wrapped her dark robes about her and left the village in the wake of the sand-storm.

The hermit doctor laid his hand gently on Joan's tumbled hair, as Rodney came into the room.

"She saved him," the doctor said, as he greeted Rodney.

"Oh, it is good, good to know he is saved!" Joan cried, "but I was only one instrument that God put here to help him until you came, and Mona brought you, doctor. Mona was another of God's instruments."

The doctor looked at her blankly. This was his first visit to the village since the advent of Joan.

Rodney gathered the child up in his arms, and smiled at the doctor.

"She is the dearest and bravest little girl in the world, doctor, with a wonderful and sublime faith in the Infinite," Rodney said, gently.

"A wonderful and sublime faith in the Infinite," the hermit doctor repeated to himself, after Rodney

and Joan had gone and he was alone with the sick man.

“Well, such namby-pamby Sunday School belief is all right for children,” he said, with a short laugh, as he walked across the room and looked out over the desert. The moon hung low in the sky now, and earth and heaven met in a flood of silver light.

“A wonderful and sublime faith in the Infinite,” the doctor again repeated the words almost unconsciously. The next instant he shrugged his shoulders in self-disgust. He had convinced himself during the hours he had spent alone in his self-imposed isolation, that there was no such thing as a soul or a soul’s immortality. No God. No life beyond the grave. He took a certain pride in proclaiming to the desert, stretching itself in majestic silence about him, that he was an agnostic; that he had risen superior to all canting religious dogma. He prided himself on his renunciation of the orthodox religion of his forefathers; flattered himself that he had discovered the highest law of life—life that ended at dissolution—when he discovered that there was no soul, no God.

Belief in spirituality was, so he argued to the silent desert, something for old women and weak men to cant about over their tea. What need of such belief had a strong man? According to him

the utter heartlessness and aimlessness of God—if there was a God—had been proven in his own case.

Hadn't he called upon God in his hour of despair—he had believed in God then—but how could any sane man continue to believe in Infinite Love when the supposed God turned a deaf ear to one pleading for something more precious than life itself. He struck his open palm with hard-clenched knuckles. "No! A thousand times no, there is no God," he cried aloud, forgetting that he was not alone as he had been the last long years.

The sick man stirred and mumbled faintly, "'And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.'"

The doctor scowled at the sick man, his brows creased in anger. "What right has he?" he demanded of his inner self, "what right has he to say those words *now*." Then he smiled reminiscently. How often his stern old father had quoted those words to him—they were the last words his mother ever spoke. Close on the heels of this memory came the words of Mona, the half-breed, that same night when he asked her if she had not been afraid on her long, lonely ride. He could almost see her fathomless eyes now, could almost hear the low-voiced words, "I, Mona, was not afraid, *her* Lord of Hosts was with me."

He had wondered then at the words of the little half-breed, now he knew that she had referred to the odd child, who had saved the life of the sick man, and whose clear blue eyes, with the vivid dashes of gold in the iris, were so hauntingly familiar of other eyes that had once smiled at him.

The odd child had called herself an instrument of God. He sat down by the sick man. If there was a God surely he would not let any one suffer as this man had suffered this night. "Bah, it is all a farce, this belief in God—but *is it a farce?*"

The sick man muttered in his sleep. "'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever'—yes, forever, little Joan."

"Joan! Joan!" The doctor repeated the word over and over. "Joan! Joan!" Cold sweat broke out all over him. It was years since he had heard that name—years since he had even allowed himself to think of it—and now this sick man called some one Joan—was it the odd child? The name would fit her. He got up slowly, like a man suddenly stricken with age. He opened the door softly, and went out into the night. Up and down, back and forth he paced in front of the little cottage—back and forth over the very spot where Rodney and Joan had knelt in prayer a few hours before.

Toward morning, peace came to the man—peace

and a new understanding. He entered the cottage, his face radiant with the light of the new joy that had come to him.

"Eternity! Eternity!" he whispered in reverential awe, looking down on the peaceful face of the sleeping man.

"Yes, old chap, you will 'dwell in the house of the Lord forever,' and even I may also dwell there with you some day. I was blind, but now I see. I see! Thank God, I see! I understand! Thank God for you and the child 'with a wonderful and sublime faith in the Infinite.' How true it is 'A little child shall lead them' . . . Yes, and thank God, too, for the little half-breed," he added, with a tender, reminiscent smile. "*She* said the little half-breed was also God's instrument. And so she was—so she was." He looked down on Arth again. "Your life is prolonged by this night's work, old chap, and my soul is saved. How wonderful are the ways of the Lord. Old chap, I, too, am saved."

The hermit doctor stayed at the village several days, and from Lois Reeves and Arth had a clear account of Joan. When he started to leave, he took Joan's hands in his and said gravely: "You have done more for me, little girl, than you will ever know. I needed saving a thousand times more than poor Arth did. Arth was square with his God when

I came to him. I was not. You must not hope for Arth's complete recovery, little Joan. Some time he will not recover, no matter how quickly I get to him, but you have saved a soul for all time. I am going back to Seven Pine Lodge now, but I shall not go alone. I am coming back, too, for that birthday party of yours, and sooner if you need me."

Joan smiled at him, but her heart was heavy because there was no hope for Arth's complete recovery. Joan was very fond of the dark, silent man, and she prayed now, as the hermit doctor rode away, that Arth would live long enough to see his wife.

That very morning she had, with Rodney's approval, written a letter to Arth's wife, in which she gave a characteristic and accurate account of Arth's almost fatal attack and his present serious condition.

She did not tell Arth of this letter. She knew that he intended for her to write to his wife only in case of his death, but it had seemed right to both her and Rodney for Arth's wife to know of his condition. They both hoped Arth's wife would come to him immediately upon receipt of the letter. From Sam Welch, Joan secured a railroad time-table, and began to count the hours that must elapse before Jeanette Arth could reach her sick husband.

Each day she and Mona spent an hour or more at the Cave of Rest. They held a prayer service there. Joan prayed daily for Jeanette Arth to come quickly, the prayers growing in length and fervor as the days passed and no word came from the sick man's wife.

Mona, at Joan's request, had mastered the Lord's Prayer, and each day she repeated it after Joan, and to Joan, Mona's part of the prayer service was something very sweet.

Each passing day Mona grew more and more like her white father. Looking into her face, lighted by the great gray eyes, Rodney found it hard to believe that the blood of the great Fighting Wolf flowed in her veins.

Mona had received the warm praise of every one, except the Major, for her wild ride on King Solomon. Even Prudence had openly expressed her admiration for such bravery. Prudence was not a little ashamed over the part she had played that night. She had been unusually kind to Joan ever since, and was planning with Rodney and Lois Reeves for the birthday party they were to give Joan and Mona on the first of May. As nearly as any one could learn, Mona's natal day was the same as Joan's, and this to Joan was a thrilling thought over which to rejoice.

CHAPTER XI

ON the morning of her birthday, Joan was up and out while the moon still hung pale in the sky, flanked by a myriad of stars just beginning to twinkle their last farewell to the night, before the curtain of dawn was flung across them with the promise of a glorious day written rose-hued upon it.

Joan stood on the lower step of the cottage, reveling in the beauty of the morning, while Don, at her feet, rolled in ecstasy, gleaming like a ball of gold against the dull glow of the crusted sand.

To Joan, the desert was ever calling with an insistent voice. The shifting sand hills ever held out beckoning, rippling arms to her. To her, the desert never seemed harsh or ugly even when a burning, scorching heat fell upon it, withering even the scant vegetation to which it gave reluctant sustenance.

It was given to Joan to see the soul of things, not the body alone.

She heard the song of the desert, every note of

it ringing true. The song the desert sings may be an adagio of pain and distress or an allegro of delirium and death, but through it all there is that distinct and flowing undercurrent of divine peace found nowhere else.

Joan was atune with the harmony of it all. She answered the desert's call with a soul as sincere as the desert itself—answered it even as she had answered the call of Rodney's violin.

To her, the morning stars were ever singing in a very exuberance of joy because they were permitted to shine on a land so hallowed—so full of strength—so full of silence, that vast uncomprehending silence where the soul of man may come into its own fullness of strength.

One by one the stars faded away and the rising sun flung rosy streamers of Celestial fire athwart the pale gray sky.

Suddenly, in the sky, high above the Cave of Rest, there appeared a magic city. A city of golden streets, trodden by radiant celestial beings.

"Oh! Oh! It must be a glimpse of heaven," Joan cried.

And then the city was gone and the sun shot upward, a glorious trail of fire marking its pathway through the blue, blue sky.

Joan never forgot that matchless dawn. She

stood for a moment in awed silence, then cried, "Oh, Father in Heaven, I thank thee for the glimpse of the shining kingdom."

The barking of the dogs in the Indian village, followed by the tumbling of half-clad Indian children out of the shacks, brought her back to the earth and things earthy.

Although Joan had not mentioned the fact to any one, she had been secretly thrilling with the thought of riding King Solomon ever since Mona's wild ride for the hermit doctor. Each day she made a visit to the corral with an offering of a lump of sugar and the big black beauty ever greeted her with a welcoming whinny.

Many were the fairy tales Joan had woven about King Solomon—King Solomon with his proudly dilating nostrils, sweeping mane and tail, and glossy black satin skin.

Joan had almost convinced herself that King Solomon was enchanted and could be ridden only by those who had won the favor of the magician who had control of him.

Mona was one of the favored ones, who could safely ride him—Joan believed she was also one who could in safety ride the beauty.

Joe, the Indian, whom Rodney had hired to conquer King Solomon, had made one attempt in that

direction and was now nursing a broken arm because of it.

But Joe's misfortune was not even weighed in the balance with desire and Mona's achievement. How could it be by one of Joan's temperament?

Joan flung her arms about Don's neck and whispered something in his ear. Don wagged his tail and barked joyfully.

"Come on, Don," Joan called, aloud, and started down the road to Sam Welch's corral.

Rodney got to the cottage door just as Joan was disappearing in the distance on top of King Solomon. Rodney never forgot the anguish of the minutes that followed—minutes that were eternities of time.

"O Lord, she'll be killed and——"

He did not finish the sentence. Joan came tearing back on the big black; her hair was flying, her eyes dancing, and she was laughing—laughing out loud. Light and easy she pulled the horse up beside the steps, and called out, "Oh, Rodney! Rodney! this is lovely, this is magnificent, this is almost too good to be true. See, he is enchanted, Rodney!"

Truly King Solomon did seem enchanted to Rodney, an enchanted demon, his sensitive nostrils were dilated, clouds of steam came from them, as King

Solomon restlessly pawed the sandy ground in impatient desire to be off across the glistening sand.

"Get off that brute," Rodney growled, making a reach for the bit, but the animal shied, whirled, and nearly kicked his head off. So he stood quite still in a daze of terror while Joan circled about on the horse, quieting him again.

"Didn't I tell you he was an enchanted horse, Rodney?" Joan demanded, as she was circling about. "Isn't it splendid that Mona taught me to ride this winter, now I can ride him every day. I had hoped you could master him, too, but it seems that only Mona and I can do that, although Miss Reeves might be another one."

Rodney heard little of what Joan was saying.

"She'll be killed, she'll be killed," he moaned over and over, his voice trembling with anguish.

"Get off, please, Joan," he pleaded, as the beautiful animal was at last brought to a standstill before the steps. Joan was off in an instant, light and graceful as the fairies she so dearly loved to imagine existed somewhere out there across the stretch of sand between her and the shifting sand hills.

The horse never stirred while she patted him on his silky nose.

"Go into the house, Joan," Rodney commanded, as fierce as a wounded bear.

Joan clipped her lips together. "I'll take King Solomon back to the corral first," she returned, with a trace of anger in her low voice.

Rodney faced her and his eyes were stern and hard as he repeated, "Go on into the house, Joan."

"What is the trouble?" came the mournful voice of Sam Welch.

Welch had missed King Solomon and had followed his hoofprints to Rodney's cottage, never dreaming for an instant that Joan had taken the wild animal from the corral.

"I rode King Solomon and it worried Rodney," Joan began, eagerly, as Rodney still stood there silent, stern, unyielding. He was too weak to move. All life and vigor seemed to have left his body.

"King Solomon is enchanted, Mr. Welch," Joan continued. "Mona and I can ride him in perfect safety. I had hoped Rodney could ride him, but King Solomon will not even allow Rodney to touch him."

Welch smiled whimsically as Joan rapidly and animatedly sketched her early greeting to the day and her sudden intention to surprise Rodney with her equestrian ability.

Rodney's face softened as a pleading note crept into the child's voice.

"Mr. Welch will take King Solomon back, dear," he said at last, very tenderly. "You are willing, are you not?"

"If you wish it," Joan answered, calmly, a wistful light in her expressive eyes.

Rodney had never spoken harshly to her before, and her heart was like a leaden weight. All the beauty of the morning was gone for her.

Welch spat on the sand reflectively; then wiped his mouth with a great red bandanna handkerchief.

"Reckon you'd best be some easy with her," he said to Rodney. "She's the grittiest girl-child I ever saw. Rode this brute, whew-ee! I call that going some! Well, I'll be going, but go easy with her, son, go easy with a high-strung girl-child like that."

He turned and walked slowly, solemnly away, wagging his head, while King Solomon jerked restlessly at the reins Welch gripped tight in his strong hand.

"Think of it!" Welch addressed the desert. "A little thing like her, no bigger than a pound of soap after a hard day's washing, riding a horse like this one. Whew-ee! Of course Mona rode him, but an Indian is different, someway. They may be

all human, but they don't seem it to me." He spat on the ground again with great dexterity, then stopped and eyed King Solomon tentatively.

"I'd ride you myself if I only had the backbone of that little tyke back there," he addressed King Solomon now.

King Solomon snorted in seeming disdain and shied at some imaginary foe.

"I reckon I'll not ride you yet awhile—if ever." Welch wagged his head sorrowfully. "Haven't got the backbone to do it. Whew-ee!"

"Joan rode this thing," he announced, mournfully, to Arth, as he passed the sick man's cottage.

"Oh, my Lord!" Arth's face blanched, as he leaned weakly against the door for support.

"Yep, she did," Welch repeated. "And I don't mind telling you that is something I wouldn't do myself. Whoa! Whoa, there, you brute." He pulled King Solomon back from an attempt to make a dash across the desert that called him to its alluring mysteries.

Welch enjoyed himself that morning, as he made a round of the village, recounting in his solemn way Joan's exploit of the early morning.

When Welch had gone, Rodney drew Joan to him.

"I was not so cross as I was hurt and fright-

ened, dear," he said, softly. "You won't ride that beast again, will you?"

Joan nestled in his arms with a happy sigh.

"I will not ride him again, if you do not wish it, Rodney, but I assure you Mona and I are perfectly safe on him.

"I like him because he is gingery. The old pinto I have been riding is so slow and unimaginative, and I know King Solomon is just bursting with imagination, but I'll try in the future to believe the pinto is like he was this morning. I am full of thrills yet over my brief flight on King Solomon. And, Rodney dear, I am not ungrateful for being allowed to ride the pinto." She drew back from him, with face aglow.

"A year ago I never dreamed I would ever ride anything so nice as the pinto, and I assure you I will clip my aspirations to ride King Solomon. You do not mind my petting him with the corral bars between us, do you, Rodney? I have been doing that ever since you had him. He is very fond of sugar, and I am sure he would miss that attention. He is such a sensitive and misunderstood animal."

It was news to Rodney—this having petted King Solomon all winter, but it explained in a measure the animal's allowing Mona and Joan to ride him, for Rodney shrewdly guessed that Joan's shadow,

as he called Mona, was present at these daily visits.

"And you will ride the pinto, if I ask it, will you, little girl?"

"Certainly I will. I would do anything for you, Rodney."

Rodney, looking into her glowing eyes, realized that the child's love for him was a truly great and precious love to be treasured and cared for with unceasing tenderness and patience.

"What a witch of a child she is," he mused. "Moonlight and dawn—fire and dew turned into a girl. Her feet may be on the ground, but her fancy is ever mounted on pinions."

How well he knew that the child retired to her citadel of dreams, even while her hands mechanically and correctly obeyed the dictates of her subconscious mind while she performed the few household tasks allotted her by Prudence. How many times he had seen her emerge from her fancies refreshed and radiant as one who catches the measure of the song of the elements.

Suddenly he came out of his reverie. Joan was saying, passionately, "For you—for you—I'd do anything imagined by the mind of man. If you wished it, I'd follow you across the desert in the fiercest heat of the day. I'd follow you as long as I could walk and when I couldn't walk, I'd crawl,

and when I couldn't crawl——” She stopped for a moment, at a loss for a word to express the image she had evoked of herself following Rodney across the desert under the torturing glare of the noonday sun.

“Then what?” Rodney demanded, his eyes sparkling.

“Why, I'd wriggle on after you until my tongue hung out of my mouth and my strength utterly failed, and then I'd die rejoicing because the Lord of Hosts had given me the strength to follow you as far as I did. And when I fell by the wayside, you would turn back and sit beside me, and in your heart you would be glad that I had loved you as I do and—and——” the vision became so real, her eyes filled with tears. “Oh, Rodney! Rodney!” she cried, “I never want to die and leave you, I want to live with you always.”

Rodney drew her to him, looking deep into her somber eyes.

“I pray we may never be separated, little girl,” he said, softly.

Joan pressed her cheek against the arm he had about her, and so for a long interval they stood there in the silence which is the sweetest gift of friendship and love.

Prudence broke the silence by a call to break-

fast. They were still at the table enjoying a triumph of her culinary skill—a superb breakfast not shared by the Major, much to the joy of Rodney and Joan—when a knock came at the front door.

Prudence was also secretly glad that just they three shared that birthday breakfast—Prudence had never felt secure with the Major since the night of the Indian powwow and dance—in fact the star of the mournful Welch was now steadily ascending Love's zenith.

Rodney answered the knock at the door. He came back visibly pleased.

“Was it Mona?” Joan demanded, eagerly.

“Not Mona, and no more questions, little girl. People should never ask questions on a day like this.”

“Oh! Oh!” Joan cried, ecstatically. “It is going to be another of your surprises. I am just quivering all over at the very thought of it. I am too happy for anything.

“Do you know this is the first—the very first birthday I ever had when I could feel in my very bones that some delightful something was going to happen to me. I was so full of thrills this morning I just had to ride King Solomon—he seemed to fit right in with my feelings—and then

I thought it would be such a surprise to you, Rodney."

She sighed.

"It was a surprise," Rodney returned, dryly.

"Well, eat your breakfast," Prudence snapped, but her voice had a note of amusement in it for all of its seeming harshness.

It was easy to see that Joan was in the clouds again. Her fork was poised in mid-air, a juicy bite of delicately fried ham on it.

Joan came back to earth with another long-drawn sigh.

"What now?" Rodney demanded, hiding his twitching lips with his hand.

"I was just imagining whatever could have come to the door. Oh, I am simply thrilling so that I cannot eat!"

"That imagination of yours will be the death of you some day," Prudence said, though not unkindly.

"I suppose I do seem sort of crazy to you, Aunt Prudence," Joan said, with a wry little smile.

"You are so matter of fact—and—and reliable."

"There's a dandy compliment for you, Aunt Prue," Rodney laughed.

A flush swept over the woman's face, softening it until Rodney was surprised at the glimpse of

tenderness for an instant revealed before the everyday mask slipped back over the face of the real woman—the woman making an unconscious struggle to awaken from the lethargy of sternness that had held her captive through all the years when the tenderness of a woman's heart is usually written upon her face and in the depths of her eyes.

"I am glad you think I am reliable," Prudence jerked out.

"Indeed you are reliable, Aunt Prudence. That word suits you exactly. You would no more think of doing such a wild thing, as Rodney thinks I did when I rode King Solomon this morning, than would that mountain over there."

She nodded toward the mountain, revealed through the window, a misty, purple-veiled guardian of the desert world, outlined against a sky serene.

"Humph," Prudence ejaculated, but she was pleased nevertheless.

"So you rode King Solomon, did you?" she asked. "The Lord only knows what you will do next, but I must say you are improving every day."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Aunt Prudence." Joan slipped out of her chair and planted a fervent kiss on Prudence's thin lips.

Prudence's lips did not respond to Joan's, but the woman was conscious of a strange feeling of

enjoyment, as Joan and Rodney dashed out of the room like the two children they were. Rodney White would never grow old—in him beat the heart of eternal youth.

“She’s an affectionate little thing,” Prudence whispered, as she cleared the table. “Kissed me like she meant it, too. Humph, reckon she did mean it—she is honest.” She thought a little shamedly of the first kiss Joan had given her—the kiss she had wiped off with her apron. This kiss she did not efface, not even the memory of it, and the memory lingered with her for many days.

“Aunt Prudence! Aunt Prudence!” Joan’s voice floated in to her, clear and sweet with a ring of joy throbbing in it.

“Well?” Prudence demanded tartly, as she answered the call, rubbing her hands on her apron.

“See! See!” Joan cried, dancing up and down. “One for me and one for Mona. Oh! Oh! You beauties.” She flew to the pair of glossy brown Shetland ponies hitched to the porch posts and threw her arms about the neck of the nearest one, and, as was her habit when overwrought with either pleasure or grief, burst into tears.

“Well, I never!” Prudence gasped, as Joan raised her tear-stained face from the pony’s neck,

and with a cry of "Oh, Rodney!" flung herself upon her guardian.

"I expected this, so sat down to it," Rodney said, over the tumbled head on his shoulder.

"Humph!" Prudence sniffed, but her mouth jerked with a grim smile.

Mona was as eagerly happy over the gift, in her quiet way, as Joan was in her vivid gratitude. Mona was a bright picture on her sturdy little pony, but to Rodney White nothing was ever so good to look upon as was Joan, vivid and alert, eyes shining, face aglow, as she mounted her pony.

"Can you imagine he is as good to ride as King Solomon?" Rodney asked, as he and the two little girls started for a long-planned ride to the deserted village of Tellput.

For an instant Joan's eyes flashed in memory of that wild dash on King Solomon; then she faced Rodney, the light of truth in her eyes.

"I love my birthday gift best, Rodney dear. I would rather ride him than King Solomon because I could never ride King Solomon again with just the same feeling I had when I rode him this morning."

Rodney laughed and turned to Mona. He caught the light in her eyes that had been there the night she crossed the boundary line from childhood to

womanhood. The look passed in an instant, and Mona smiled past him at Joan, her eyes grave, inscrutable, her voice low and musical as she said, "I thank you, not only for the joy the gift brings me but for the happiness it also brings her. When she, my friend, is happy, I, Mona, am full of joy."

After Mona's low-toned words the ride was continued in silence. A silence full of love and understanding and the undertone of pain in the heart of one only made sweeter the score of perfect harmony.

From Rainbow Springs, a living green garden amidst the wide stretch of dull-colored sand dotted here and there with cacti and sage redolent with an odor found nowhere but on the desert, the way lay straight across the glistening sand in a waving, serpentine, half-hidden trail until it reached the climbing path that led up the sage-grown side of Lone Pine Ridge. On the other side of Lone Pine Ridge lay the silent, deserted Indian village of Tellput.

When the morning lifted the purple veils from the mountains, their peaks were revealed in snow-crowned splendor, kissed by the ardent sun into dazzling brightness.

Under their white crests the mountains dimpled with a bewitching, alluring beauty.

A stray breeze swept across the stretch of sand and blew Joan's rebellious hair back from her forehead.

"Oh, it's good, good, just to live on a morning like this!" she cried, holding out her hands to the whispering breeze.

Don barked joyfully at the sound of her beloved voice. Don was having an active time that morning, dashing over the sand in quest of imaginary prey, for there was no sign of animal life abroad on the desert that morning.

As they turned up the winding path that wound round and around in its upward climb to the top of Lone Pine Ridge, they rode again in silence, entranced by the panorama of beauty that lay before them as they climbed higher and higher up the side of the ridge.

On the very top of Lone Pine Ridge, they looked down, on either side of it, upon the desert, majestic, mysterious. Beside the trail, perched on a projecting ledge of the ridge, under the lone pine that gives the ridge its name, stood a dilapidated three-room cottage with a shambling shed clinging to the rear room.

As they rested there under the shade of the great pine, Mona told of the last occupant of that crumbling shack: A consumptive had lived there alone—

had been found there many months after his spirit had gone to the great unknown.

When Mona had finished the pitiful story, Joan's eyes were misty with tears, she was all aquiver with sympathy for the lonely youth, who had lived there for a time in sublime confidence that health would come to such an earnest wooer of it as was he. She could almost feel the calm resignation with which he faced death there, where he could, to the last, overlook the vast solitude of the desert on either side of him.

Joan had cause to remember that cottage all the rest of her life, for the next time she saw it she was filled with anger and fear.

As they began the descent to the deserted village that lay a crumbling heap on the desert's quiet bosom, Don, some distance ahead of them, set up a furious barking.

The sun was high in the sky now, the atmosphere surcharged with a heat, the fierceness of which was never felt at Rainbow Springs. Rodney felt the heat, but Joan was as fresh and cool as when they started out in the early morning, while Mona was calm and as inscrutably grave as ever.

With a little cry of excitement, because of Don's continued barking, Joan urged her placid pony

ahead of Rodney and Mona in her eagerness to find the cause of Don's excitement.

"I fear she be sad by what she find," Mona said, gravely. "Something tells me so here." She placed her hand on her heart.

The sun-glints on her wonderful copper-tinted hair made it ripple and glisten with a vivid glow.

"What an exquisite picture she makes here with the desert her fitting background," Rodney mused, as he lightly returned, "It is only one of Don's usual wild fancies." Around Rodney's mouth were the imprints of many smiles, but his face grew as grave as Mona's when they reached a pitiful, quivering-lipped, little Joan, looking down on the half-eaten body of a dog—a dog Rodney, as well as she, instantly remembered. It was one of the two that followed the old minister across the desert the first morning they were at Rainbow Springs.

Some half-starved coyote had feasted upon the poor animal no longer ago than that morning.

Rodney dismounted and began to examine a strange adornment, if adornment it had been, that hung by a wire to the dog's collar.

"Am in old Indian well, Tellput, leg broken. God is here. Dad Sherwood," was the message faintly scratched on a small tin can lid, a lid such as comes on three-pound lard tins.

Rodney turned to Joan and Mona, and read aloud the message scratched on the can lid. "We'll find him alive, I pray," he added, as he mounted the tough buckskin Indian pony he had hired from Pedro for the day.

Joan's lips still quivered, but there was a rapt light in her eyes and Rodney knew she was silently praying.

A quarter of a mile further on they came to a heap of whitened human skeletons, flanked by other whitened bones—the grim outlines of horses and burros. Beside them lay also the bodies of two burros and a young collie dog, silent yet of such recent demise that they seemed to be sleeping. In the center of the grim setting lay the cause of the tragic story which had its beginning in the whitest heap of bones beside it—a pool of poisoned water, sparkling in deceptive allurements.

"Dad Sherwood would not drink it," Mona said, in answer to the unspoken fear in Rodney's eyes. "He knows the desert well. He would read and understand." She pointed to the whitened bones.

Rodney was glad to believe her, glad also to leave the deceiving pool of water. They cantered on to the deserted village in silence, hoping yet fearing to find the old man they sought. Rodney could almost see the silver-haired, silver-voiced old man as

he saw him that morning as he started across the desert with his burros and dogs. How the old man loved the desert—the land of harmony!

Rodney loved the desert, too, even though he knew that it held many tragic secrets in its mysterious embrace—tragedies like those of the poisoned spring they had just passed. But were those tragedies the fault of the desert? Surely the fault was not the fault of the land, the music of which touched a responsive chord in his innermost soul—the land God had endowed with life-giving power and soul-refreshing strength—the land that was to Rodney White—a divine symphony. Its vast silence, jagged mountains, and blue skies the theme. Its adagios, variations of the defiant and the defensive. Its allegros, the elusive stretches of sand, the unexplored canyons. The matchless whole softened and shaded to an exquisite pæan, brightened and illuminated by vivid dawns and purple-hued twilights with mystic interludes of moon-silvered nights.

The deserted village of Tellput is in the last crumbling stages of utter dissolution. The broken adobe walls and infirm thatch huts, squatting on the narrow trail-like streets, are the last lingering notes of the little village that once rang with the musical voices of a vanishing race.

In the heart of the deserted village, Rodney and the girls came upon a typical Indian well of bygone days.

A well at the bottom of a great terraced pit, with narrow crumbling steps leading down to the little space of ground around the pool of sparkling water. There in the ancient days many a dusky belle had gone to fill her olla, conscious of the admiring gaze of some stalwart copper-hued brave.

At the bottom of the pit, Rodney found Dad Sherwood, gaunt and almost starved, but not suffering from that desert thirst that drives men mad and causes some to call the desert "The land God forgot." By such the harmony of the desert can never be heard, but to Rodney and Dad Sherwood and the two girls riding the same pony on the homeward trip that day (the old minister rode the other one) the desert sang a superb anthem of joy.

CHAPTER XII

THAT evening at seven o'clock the birthday festivities, for Mona and Joan, began. Joan was immediately exalted to dizzy realms of delight.

Even the most desperately ill of the consumptives, at the Springs, had managed to come to the party, and the little cottage rang with laughter and jests, some of the jests grim, but through all the merriment, with the shadow of death hanging over many, there predominated the strain of humor mercifully given to most tubercular sufferers.

The garb of the sick men ran largely to the picturesque, for many of the men were college graduates. To most, the knowledge of their grim disease had come as a complete surprise—something wholly unexpected—a something that revolutionized their entire life.

When the hermit doctor came into the living-room after attending to the old minister's broken leg, the sick men greeted him with shouts of delight. Since the night of Arth's critical attack, the hermit doctor had spent the greater part of his time at the

Springs and had rendered most of the sick men some professional service.

"How is Brown?" the hermit doctor asked a laughing-eyed youth in the last stages of the grim disease. Brown, the man in question, had been at one time a successful dentist in Los Angeles. Brown had been at Rainbow Springs most of the winter, a victim also of the great white plague; the previous week he had gone to Los Angeles on business.

The reply of the sick lad was characteristic of the manner in which most of the men took the promise of the future. "Oh, Brown is all right," laughed the sick man, "I heard about him to-day—he is filling his last cavity."

The hermit doctor could not repress a smile—the young fellow was so heroically cheerful, with the same cavity yawning at his very feet.

Lois Reeves and Martha Welch arrived just then. The doctor greeted Lois with an unmistakable light in his eyes; then he went out on the porch. As he stood there, looking across the desert, its ever prevailing, haunting sense of the unknown clasping hands with the dusk gathering on its sweeping silence until the distant line of horizon was merged into the low-hanging sky and the mountains were half-hidden by misty veils of purple and the canyons were packed full of black shadows, the doctor real-

ized as never before how the majestic, mysterious desert had taken him to its heart, giving him strength first, then peace and understanding that night at Arth's.

Since that memorable night, the hermit doctor had taken a keen interest in the future that might yet be his. Joan had aroused the soul in him—Lois Reeves had awakened his heart—the heart he had thought buried forever in some unknown yet beloved and hallowed spot.

He sighed as memory marched before him its phantoms of joy and pain.

Suddenly came the thought of the youth in there making his grim jest about the last cavity, and as suddenly came the determination to go East to study the new Rattlesnake Cure of which he had read only that morning. He had the means, he loved the desert, and, surely such heroic spirits, as those making merry in there, should have a great chance to win the health they wooed so heroically.

He knew that many of them had little or no means; that many of them depended upon the dry air alone to win life's battle for them. The ones who came after that brave chap in there would be in the same financial condition. He regretted then, as he had regretted it scores of times during his few awakened days, that he had not applied his at-

tention to this disease, when he studied abroad, instead of to surgery.

He smiled as he thought of Joan. What a pæan of joy she had been to all in the village; how every one loved her—"all spirit and fire and dew" that she was.

He thought whimsically that Prudence White would approve more of the child's conduct if she were demure and prim, but every one else loved her best as she was, with her impulsive soul. He smiled again, as he thought how easily the child responded to joy. He knew, as did Rodney, that Joan would never and could never enjoy or suffer tranquilly. She would ever take the pleasure or pain life brought her with trebled intensity.

Joan's clear, happy laugh floated out to him with a haunting familiarity. He had a strange sensation of having heard that laugh and loved it in some other existence. The child's eyes were always haunting him with their resemblance to other eyes that had smiled into his.

He had smoked as he stood there; now he threw the cigar away and went back into the house. High carnival met him—Dad Sherwood had been carried in on his cot. Rodney had brought the old man home with him from Tellput, and intended to

keep him, as his guest, until the old minister was entirely himself again.

Joan was fluttering about the old man's cot. As she bent over the old minister to straighten an already immaculate pillow, the doctor was suddenly conscious of whom she reminded him. Over his face crept an ashy pallor and he seemed suddenly to have crossed the boundary line between the fullness of life and extreme old age.

The Major was the only white person in the village who was not present at the party that night. The Major sulked beside his own fire; he had made his first complete proposal to Prudence that day. He had met with an unexpected rejection—a rejection so firm that neither cajolery, flattery, nor protestations of an undying love moved it. Prudence was inflexible; although her heart throbbed strangely—the Major's proposal was the first that had ever been made to her and it had shaken her to the very depths—shaken her so that she was unusually kind to Welch that night, for Prudence had an unaccountable longing to hear from Welch the words she had scorned from the Major.

Mona was very beautiful and very happy that night. Her great eyes glowed with a soft radiance that made Rodney rejoice every time he looked at her. But the will-o'-the-wisp Joan was, to him, the

most glorious thing on earth, as she flitted about among the guests with a bright, encouraging word for every one. His heart throbbed with joy, as he looked into the faces of the sick men after the child had spoken to them—one and all they reflected the light of joy so vivid in the child's expressive countenance.

At Rodney's request every one had remembered Joan and Mona with gifts identical—this, that Joan's sensitive heart should not be wounded as it would have been, had she received more than did Mona.

Rodney alone made a difference of gifts between the two—this was a secret between him and Joan—but for the first time, Joan, that night, wore her locket on the outside of her dress, and this night a slender gold chain had taken the place of the well-worn ribbon to which it had been fastened when Rodney first saw the miniatures face, in its setting of pearls.

The hermit doctor watched the old minister closely as the merriment grew in volume about them.

The old minister finally caught the look in the younger man's eyes and beckoned to him.

When the doctor was seated beside him, the old man said softly, "You notice, I see, that I am myself again."

The doctor nodded.

"The fall seemed to clear all the blur away, and during the hours I spent down there in the old well I came to my right mind. The trouble will never come back, will it?" There was a note of anxiety now, in the low musical voice.

The doctor studied the fine old face intently. The light of reason, in the old eyes, was as clear as that in his own. He held out his hand and gripped the old one that met it so eagerly. His voice, when he spoke, was husky.

"You need never fear the return of the cloud. Often a fall, such as you had, restores one to perfect sanity and, I am happy to say that you are perfectly normal now, Mr. Sherwood."

The old man pressed his hand gratefully. "It is good, good," he said, softly. "Those were long hours I spent in the old well. I was unconscious for a long time, but when reason came again it brought with it a clarity of reason that had not been mine since my great loss." He sighed; then his eyes brightened, as Joan came flying to him, holding triumphantly aloft a handsome silver dog collar.

"For Don," she cried. "Mr. Welch brought it to Don." As the silver and gold-brown heads bent together over the dog collar, the locket Joan

wore swung out on the slender gold chain and flew open, revealing the miniature face in all its wistful beauty.

The doctor saw and was held speechless by the pictured face so like Joan's—the face of the other Joanna. Over his face crept a slow, ashen-gray wave, and his hand shook as he lifted it slowly and closed it a minute upon his eyes as one does to clear a blurred vision.

So the shuttles of life fly swiftly to and fro through the years—swiftly, silently weaving patterns which one may not trace. Patterns woven in the strange loom of Life while fate shifts the frames and now and then ties a broken thread, linking the past with the present after a lapse of many years.

The voice of the old minister, at last, reached through the questioning reverie into which the hermit doctor had drifted. He heard the silver voice as one hears dream voices, but he never forgot the words.

“You open before me memory's casket of jewels, little girl,” the old minister was saying. “Once I would have looked upon them with naught but pain in my heart, now there is sweetness where once pain reigned supreme.”

Joan curled up on the cot beside the old man and

buried her chin in her hands—her eyes were mystic wells of interest now.

The hermit doctor watched the child; his hand still shading his eyes.

“Memory’s casket is of gold and wonderfully carved by the goldsmith of life,” continued the mellow voice. “It is full of jewels, little girl. All the jewels that are in the foundation of the New Jerusalem are there. Jaspers made of the mistakes of our lives, opaque and highly polished.

“Sapphires of the golden days and care-free nights. Chalcedonies lustrous with mingled pleasure and pain. Emeralds made of the joys of youth. Sardonyx of evil thoughts and white forgiveness. Sardius speaking of the heart’s deepest love. Chrysolite speaking of ‘Green pastures and still waters.’ Some day we will look at them all, little girl, even the Pearls that are the unshed tears of our heart’s deepest sorrows, but now, if I mistake not, we are going to hear something that will be as a cup of cold water to our thirsty souls.”

Joan’s eyes followed his and her heart throbbed with joy. Rodney stood across the room with his violin tucked under his chin. She clutched at her throat; she knew Rodney was going to play for her; her heart seemed to almost stop beating at the

thought of again hearing the voice of the violin.

In almost a whisper came the voice of the violin, soft and full and sweet as an angel's call.

By invisible degrees the melody grew in volume, full of life and majesty, yet with a throbbing, thrilling, whispering undertone of peace and perfect understanding.

The majesty of the song of the desert, as it had spoken to Rodney, was there, and he wove a masterful improvisation of it in that wonderful theme. The defiant and defensive, the minor plaintive notes lightened and brightened by days of clear skies, moon-silvered nights, rippling whispers of some grateful breeze with variations of the trills of the mocking bird that lived in the great pepper tree that overshadowed the house.

Then came a brighter theme; its variations frolicsome and mirthful as a bubbling brook, chuckling with joy as it flows on and on until caught up by other babbling brooks and merged at last in a rushing river of swirling eddies and turbulent currents—the river of life itself—life as Rodney had known it—a river that flowed on and on throbbing with resounding chords and epic songs of prayer and pain and joy and peace until with a final chord, majestic in its absolute surrender to the will of the Infinite—the power that leads the

brook on to the river, the river on to the sea of fulfillment—the violin ceased speaking.

Joan only half stifled a sob that was a strange mingling of joy and pain. Rodney smiled at her as his fingers began to shape the melody of the "Ave Maria."

Joan recognized the melody and smiled with joy, while the melody itself was being interpreted by a master, who expressed in it *himself*. Rodney saw again that little pathetic figure crouched in front of his fire and the violin spoke softly; then laughed and thrilled with a holy joy because the child had answered an earlier cry of pain—of sorrow, followed by sweet resignation.

Then came a note of hope in the violin's voice and it spoke of hope to those from whom hope had fled.

Life seemed to take on a new promise of extension—seemed to have been given for something besides patient endurance. Enjoyment, peace, and fulfillment of something majestic and full of recompense seemed also to be included in the scheme of things.

When the guests, of that memorable night, departed, on their faces was a reflection of that exaltation that shone in Joan's eyes and radiated her every feature. Happiness hung round Joan like a

garment—she seemed to have been bathed in some ethereal fountain of supreme joy—a joy that was contagious. Every one there felt some of the unalloyed joy she represented.

The hermit doctor lingered after all the rest of the guests had gone. After Joan had gone reluctantly to bed, too thrilled to sleep, the doctor asked Rodney if the miniature face in Joan's locket was the face of some relative of the child.

"Her mother," Rodney answered, tersely. "Her father was a cur, he deserted her and her child-mother when *my* Joan was a little baby." Rodney's voice was raspy with hate now; he detested the man who had deserted the child and the wistful-eyed mother.

As he spoke the doctor's face blanched with the gray pallor that is not the pallor of death but something more ghastly.

"Perhaps there were extenuating circumstances," he advanced, when Rodney ceased his tirade against Joan's father.

"There could be none for such a wrong," Rodney returned heatedly, and the doctor's heart felt like lead until the old minister lightened the leaden weight by a low-voiced, "We cannot know, my boy, the circumstances—we should not judge. We must always remember the *One* who forgives all

things and commands us to forgive even as we hope to be forgiven. It's a grand life we live, boys, if we live it as we should. Every one has his own fight to make—every one knows his own limitations—knows his own soul. When the Lord is with us—when the soul is right a man can conquer anything, can be forgiven anything.”

“When the soul is right a man can conquer anything,” the doctor repeated, softly, as he went down the sandy road toward Arth's cottage. There was a light shining in Arth's window and the shade was not drawn. The doctor walked close to the window and looked in, not after the manner of one who spies on others. The doctor looked to assure himself of Arth's physical condition, after the hours he had spent in unusual excitement.

Arth was sitting on the side of his bed; his face, revealed by the dim light of the smoky lamp, was pain drawn, his lips were quivering, his eyes misty, as he looked upon the little photograph he held in his hand.

The doctor turned away, a low moan of sympathy wrung from him. “Every man has his own fight to make.” He quoted the old minister again.

“God knows I have my fight to make,” he said, hoarsely. In the translucent moonlight, he looked

white and spent. He walked down the road past Lois' cottage, as walk the very old or those who have just left a freshly filled grave.

Before his eyes was the face of Lois as he had seen it ever since it had first been indelibly stamped upon his mind in all its winsome and alluring womanly tenderness.

Until he saw the miniature that night, he had hoped and prayed that he might win Lois, but could he ever make her understand—could he make her believe in the extenuating circumstances? There was only his word against the contradictory evidence of the years. "Would she understand?" He appealed to the serene moon and stars, mocking him with their serenity.

And yet Lois Reeves was, to him, the very acme of intelligence. Divinely womanly was she, therefore divinely forgiving, "but would she understand?" he questioned over and over. How unspeakably desirable was she, this woman he might hope to win, but for the specter of the past, his past—the gaunt, grim specter of circumstantial evidence.

Would she ever believe he was not to blame?

Suddenly came the thought that he need not tell her of the grim specter. No one need ever know of the past. No one had seen him when he looked

upon that miniaturesd, wistful face—the face that confirmed his wild thoughts—the wild fancies that were proven correct. How his brain had whirled with them ever since he first looked into the child's hauntingly familiar eyes.

Compounded in the winsome personality of the child was all that was good and noble of that other Joanna of those blissful days of his youth. The child was like some young goddess now—the replica of the child-mother who had borne her, yet in her was his own fiery temper. He could again hear the voice of Rodney White, as he said: "Joan is like some rare strain of music with an occasional discord of temper."

The doctor's face flushed as he recalled the ring in Rodney's voice as he told of Joan's pride in the marriage certificate—how the sensitive, high-strung child must have been made to suffer by some unscrupulous harpy. Some one had no doubt called the adored mother an unkind name or the marriage certificate that proved that mother's purity would not be so cherished by a child.

The man's innermost consciousness seemed to shrink as from a sudden blow. His cringing cowardice was the cause of the child's humiliation. How Rodney White hated the man who had caused it—and how cordial Rodney White was to him.

He laughed. "O God, what a farce life is, after all!" He shrugged his shoulders as if to shake off a burden that was grievous to bear. He knew that the time might come when he could no longer keep silent—not even to win Lois.

A great, surging flood of paternal love swept over him. He turned and looked back toward the little unpainted shack where Lois lived and the paternal love receded, was swept away by an overwhelming tide of love for the winsome, womanly girl, making such a brave fight for her health while she taught the Indian school and—and oh, the irony of it—her only white pupil was the child, Joan.

He tried to moisten his dry lips with his parched tongue. Lois had been very sweet and gracious to him that night.

His eyes brightened at the thought of her. How proud he would be of her as his wife! He struck his open palm with clenched knuckles. "I'll win her," he cried, triumphantly. He smiled again very tenderly, his eyes on the little unpainted shack with silver moonlit bars of light laid lightly over it, softening its crude outlines.

Yes, he would marry Lois Reeves and cease to be sad and conscience-stricken over his discovery. The child was well cared for. He must forget his dis-

covery, and yet how hauntingly sweet was she—the replica of his first love.

“O God!” he cried. “Drawn to her as I am by every fiber of my being, still I dare not own her now. I must—I must win Lois. Lois! Lois! You are far more dear to me than was my first love. I love now as a man—then I was a boy. Lois! Lois! I must win you. I simply haven’t the courage to acknowledge that first love and—and the child—I cannot lose you, Lois. And why should I ever mention the past?” he demanded, fiercely, wringing his locked hands. “I will go East, as I planned to-night before my fears were confirmed, and when I come back I will do a work here of which you will be proud, Lois dear. And some day—some day, Lois dear, you will be mine. I love you, Lois, as woman never was loved before. I long for you in spirit and body as woman was never desired before.

“I love you ten thousand times more than I loved the love of my youth, and yet God knows how I loved her—love her still as one loves the memory of something very precious and lovely that has been laid away for years in a golden casket such as the old minister told of to-night.”

Raising his eyes to the serene, star-jeweled sky, he tried to frame a prayer, but he could not pray.

"There shall be nothing hidden that shall not be revealed," came to him with the force of a catapult, hurling him back to the beginning again—back where he was when he came out into the starry night.

He turned and walked back through the village to the old Indian graveyard, and sank down upon a flat boulder.

He remained there on the rock and watched the moon go down and the soft veil of utter darkness fall over the desert world—the veil of utter blackness that precedes the dawn. The desert throbbed and pulsated in some mystic, majestic music and still the man sat there without any sense of fatigue—without reaching any final solution of the problem that confronted him. At daybreak he went back to the village, without meeting any one. A light still burned low in Arth's cottage. He quickened his pace, fearing that Arth might have been taken suddenly worse. He peered in at the same window through which he had looked just after he left Rodney's. He sighed with relief, as his eyes rested on Arth sleeping peacefully. He turned away from the window and looked down the road toward Lois' cottage.

The first rays of the morning sun touched the little unpainted shack with a kindly light.

"Lois! Lois! God grant that you may some day be mine," he cried, softly, reverently baring his head.

A few days later the hermit doctor went East—his problem still unsolved; his secret still his own.

A beautiful May gave place to a warm but radiantly beautiful June. Each passing day was a pæan of joy for Rodney and Joan and the old minister, who still remained at Rodney's, although his broken leg was long since healed.

The porch was the Mecca of the three these days. The instant Joan returned from school, she curled up on the cot beside the old minister, while he told her of the Southern city, on the edge of which had been the ivy-covered church, where he had ministered to his flock for more than twoscore years—loving his people and understanding them as only a poet soul, endowed with a spiritual divinity, can love and understand.

"We are going to have splendid school exercises next week when school closes," Joan cried, one day, as she flung herself on the cot beside the old man, breathless and flushed from the wild run she, and Mona, and Don had made up the sandy road, gleaming like a golden ribbon under the summer sun.

"Where is Rodney?" she demanded, when she had caught her breath.

"With Arth. Poor Arth, he is not so well to-day. Yet, why should I call him poor Arth? He is a divinely fortunate Arth—he is God's own child ready to be gathered to the 'realm of pure delight,' " he murmured to himself.

Joan's face clouded and a tender, wistful look crept into her eyes. Arth was never so well these days—and his wife had not come. Joan was glad now that Arth did not know of the letter she had written his wife so many weeks ago. Each morning when she looked into the sick man's feverish face, her heart ached and throbbed in sympathy and understanding of the longing, wistful look in his eyes.

Her early, unchildlike life had taught her the lesson of pain and longing for the touch of a hand of love and understanding—for the presence of one's very own loved ones.

She knew that Arth each day longed more and more for his wife, because the little picture was always on the pillow beside him the days he was too spent to be up.

The old man sighed and brushed his shining silver hair back from his forehead.

A cool breeze swept in across the desert. The

air felt good to him. He sighed with distinct relief. This was almost as good as being in his garden at home—the garden beside the ivy-covered church.

He looked at Joan with a tender smile. The child's face showed her misery over the thought of Arth.

How tender she was—how quickly touched she was by the suffering of others—how generous she was to his protégée, Mona, and yet what an untamable firefly of a child she was, he mused. He sought now to divert her—to bring the sparkle of light back to her eyes.

“I can just see, yonder in that purple veil over the mountain, my churchyard wall and beyond it the red gables of my rectory,” he said, whimsically.

Joan's eyes followed his, and he knew by the uplift of her head that she too saw the vision.

He laughed a low, musical laugh of pleasure. The wind came in stronger and cooler now, and blew his white hair about like threads of silver tapestry.

“I can almost smell my old-fashioned clove pinks, lassie,” he said, gently.

“So can I.” Joan's face was radiant. “Let us have a garden here,” she cried, eagerly.

"So we shall, lassie, so we shall," agreed the old minister. "We'll send back to my old home for some cuttings and seeds from the old garden, and——"

"And, Dad! Dad!" Joan interrupted, her eyes shining. "There is a church here. Oh, Dad! Dad! you'll preach in it, won't you?"

The old man's eyes followed hers to the little church silhouetted against the shadows banking up between it and the mountains. His eyes lighted and his face was transfigured with an inner glory, as he saw the little church in a new light.

"So I can, so I can, and shall, lassie," he said at last. "I wonder I did not think of it—the little church I have longed for—the little church ready and waiting for me," he mused, as Joan flew down the road to meet Rodney.

Then he sighed, as he remembered the cloud that had darkened his intellect before his fall.

"'And a little child shall lead them,'" he said to Rodney, his voice soft with emotion, as Rodney and Joan came up the steps hand in hand, chatting joyously.

"Come on in, Joan," came the voice of Prudence from the living-room.

"Coming, Aunt Prudence," Joan responded,

meekly. She wondered if she had done anything to merit the displeasure of Prudence.

"Hope Aunt Prue does not scold her," Rodney said, taking a chair near the old man.

"She won't," the old minister returned, cheerfully. "I smell cookies," he added, boyishly. "I prophesy they are coming our way, too."

"You are a good prophet, Dad," Rodney laughed, as Joan came dashing out to them, all flushed and glowing, a plate heaped high with fragrant cookies, held out before her.

"I am to take Mr. Arth some," she cried, excitedly, setting the plate of cookies on a small table in easy reach of both men. "Aunt Prudence is too good for anything," she flung over her shoulder, as she came out the second time with a heaping plate of the delicately browned dainties.

"I repeat 'a little child shall lead them,'" the old man said, fervently.

"Something has changed Aunt Prue," Rodney said, softly. "I never had cookies when I was a little chap, unless Judge Wheaton gave them to me when his wife baked—and I am sure he slipped them for me," he added, with a little reminiscent sigh.

The old minister smiled at him understandingly; then began to tell Rodney of his talk with Joan that

afternoon, becoming more and more enthusiastic as he expressed his suddenly formed plan to open the little church, so long only a silent building of God, and make of it a house of worship for all those in the little village.

CHAPTER XIII

“WELL, what now?” demanded Prudence, one day, as Joan came dashing in with Don.

“Take that dog out of here, Joan Worthington,” she commanded tartly, her keen eyes cold now, as Don gamboled about Joan, leaping and barking for the letter the child held high above her head.

“Oh, Aunt Prue, let Don alone a minute,” Rodney pleaded. “Please let him alone, can’t you see Joan is excited.”

“She’s always excited,” Prudence snapped crossly, as she prodded Don out of the room.

“Never mind, dear,” Rodney comforted.

“I can’t mind now, but I shall feel perfectly terrible over my excitement getting dear old Don in trouble, after I have time to recover from the thrills this letter has brought me.”

Rodney smiled and flung himself down in a great armchair. He knew full well that Joan would perch on the arm of it the next instant.

He was not mistaken. In her favorite place, on the chair arm, her cheek pressed close against

Rodney's, Joan held out at arm length the cause of her excitement.

"Listen, Rodney White! Just listen, 'Miss Joan Worthington, Rainbow Springs, California.' Now, what do you think of that? Just think of being called 'Miss.' I am so thrilled, Rodney."

There was no doubt about Joan being thrilled, her dancing eyes and glowing face testified eloquently to the excitement that had set its signals there.

"Have you opened it?" Rodney asked, suddenly.

Joan looked at him reproachfully.

"As if I would, Rodney, when I never would have had it if it were not for you. I'm not half as ungrateful for all you've done for me as were the Israelites to the Lord of Hosts. I am grateful to him, too, for leading me to you that night—more grateful than you can imagine—I don't see how I ever lived all those weary, weary years without you, Rodney." Very sober and serious was Joan now, as she half smothered her guardian with a bear-like hug.

"I don't see how I ever managed to live without you either, little sunshine," Rodney returned, with a catch in his breath. He often wondered these days how he would have lived, all the months here

at Rainbow Springs, without the child. The words of the old minister came back to him, as he held Joan close in his arms. He repeated them, softly, " ' She is a sweet spirit come to Rainbow Springs to bring peace to the hearts of many.' " How true the prophecy had been! She had indeed brought peace to the hearts of many. More than one had died a Christian because of her. Almost every day he heard from some one, " She has taught me how to live—and how to die."

" Wake up and let's open it." Joan's laughing voice brought him out of his reverie.

" Let us do so—of course it is from Arth's Jeanette—we'll go to meet her together and bring her to him, what say? " he cried, boyishly.

" Oh, how fascinating that will be! " Joan began to carefully tear open the envelope. She was never one to slur the happiness of anticipation by undue haste.

" I shall feel that I have not lived in vain if dear Mr. Arth's wife comes—before it is too late "—her voice trembled.

" Oh! Oh! It is not from her," she wailed, as womanlike she read the name signed at the close of the letter, before beginning to read the letter itself.

" What now? " Prudence demanded, as she came

into the room, over her sulk about the forbidden entrance of Don.

"Oh! Oh! My fond hopes are all shattered. I fear I have lived in vain," Joan wailed.

"Well, I never!" Prudence sniffed, as she stooped and picked the letter up from the floor where it had fallen from Joan's nerveless fingers.

"Joan, I wish you wouldn't cry on Rodney's shirt fronts," she said. "It makes them hard to wash," with a note of dry humor in her voice.

"Does it, Aunt Prudence?" Joan sprang penitently to her feet. "I'll cry some place else when I have to burst into tears again."

Rodney pressed his lips together in rigid determination not to hurt the child by laughing, but his eyes danced behind half-closed lids.

"Come back, Joan," he entreated, when he could control his voice enough to speak.

"Not until I am perfectly sure I shall weep no more," Joan returned, with a little catch in her voice.

"Suppose you read your letter," Prudence suggested. Prudence was endowed with a certain amount of feminine curiosity.

"I suppose I might as well," Joan said, slowly. "But it is perfectly dreadful to know it is not from Mr. Arth's wife. I think I can safely sit on your

chair arm, now, Rodney. I am quite sure I have perfect control of myself." She turned to Prudence. "I'll try to remember not to cry on Rodney in the future, Aunt Prudence, but just imagine what a pleasure it is to have some one to cry on after a life-time spent in bearing one's sorrows alone. I assure you, however, that I am exceedingly sorry to have added to your care of me by yielding to such an extremely feminine weakness.

"You have been more than kind to bear it in silence so long. I certainly appreciate the many times I have been allowed to cry on Rodney."

"Well, read your letter," Prudence snapped, but her eyes, as they met Rodney's, were not devoid of humor.

The letter was from the hermit doctor—a nice cordial little-letter in which the hermit doctor announced that he was enthusiastic over his first impressions of the new cure for tuberculosis. The letter closed with best wishes to all and a brief mention of a small present for Joan and Mona, being forwarded by express.

"Oh, isn't it perfectly splendid to think of having a present sent by express! I really don't see how I am to live until it comes. I am thrilling all over, nice cold shivers of joy are playing hide-and-go-seek all over me."

Rodney smiled at the happy child.

"I must go right over and tell Mona," she cried, and was off like a flash, waving the letter high above her head.

"Come on, Don," she shouted, and Don leaped and bounded beside her, his grief over being ejected from the house forgotten in this new, wild dash.

"What is it, my friend?" Mona asked, with a note of amusement in her soft, flowery voice, as Joan faced her, flushed and breathless.

"Let us go to the Cave of Rest," Joan panted.

"If you wish, but what is that?" Mona indicated the letter still held triumphantly aloft.

"It is the reason we are going to the Cave of Rest." Joan pressed Mona's hand. "We'll not say a single word until we get there, please."

Mona nodded acquiescence. So they climbed the well-worn trail to the Cave of Rest in breathless silence—a silence broken only by Don's exuberant barks, as he dashed ahead of them, seeking some imaginary prey.

At the Cave of Rest, Mona listened in silence, while Joan read the brief letter.

"I am radiantly happy, aren't you, Mona?" Joan demanded, leaning back against her friend, with a little sigh of joy.

Mona smiled dreamily. "When you are happy, little friend, I, Mona, am more than happy."

"Isn't it splendid not to know his name," Joan went on, not noticing that Mona had expressed happiness only because of her pleasure.

Mona nodded.

"The hermit doctor!" Joan rolled the words luxuriously. "That is the way he signs himself here, Mona, and I have imagined the most wonderful story about him. I have asked ever so many what his real name is and no one knows, not even the Major nor Mr. Welch."

"Tell your imagined story," Mona demanded.

Joan flung herself down on the blanket-covered boulder, near the entrance to the cave, face down, her chin buried in the hollows of her hands, her eyes glowing as they ever glowed when her soul took flight to the realm of fancy.

Mona took her place on a small flat rock facing her, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her palm, silent—a world of mystery in her great dark eyes.

"Well, to begin with, he has a secret sorrow," Joan said, with her eyes on the twin palms, revealed through the half-concealed opening of the cave.

"A secret sorrow that gnaws at his very vitals with a consuming fierceness. I read that in a book

once, Mona, so don't credit me with thinking up such a beautiful expression."

Joan closed her eyes dreamily.

"In the dear, dead past he must have loved a beautiful maiden with glorious blue eyes and sun-kissed hair. I think he and the beautiful maiden must have married and lived in unspeakable happiness for a brief—all too brief a time. That last is another sentence out of the same book, but it describes my feelings about this perfectly. The heroine in the book had raven hair and an alabaster brow, with teeth of pearl and midnight eyes, but the hermit doctor would never find a kindred spirit in any one who had raven hair and midnight eyes—I feel that instinctively. I imagine Miss Reeves is very like his beautiful bride must have been.

"Mona, do you know you have very romantic hair?—copper-hued tresses and even red hair is so romantic, so many, many heroines have red hair. Of course raven hair is also popular, but then I do not care for raven-haired heroines. Every one does not see alike, and Rodney says: 'It is a splendid thing they do not.' I am sure everything is very interesting the way it is, and it is naturally perfect or the Lord would not have made so many different people in the beginning. You remember He speaks of divers tongues and many diversities of things—

that does not sound just right, but the meaning is perfectly clear to me."

"But what about the doctor and the beautiful maiden?" demanded Mona. Mona was interested in the fancy.

"Oh, they lived in happiness and beauty side by side," returned Joan, cheerfully. "Don't you think the hermit doctor could be called beautiful, Mona? I do. I suppose Miss Reeves would call him handsome. His eyes are so sad when he forgets himself, and his face is so long and perfect. Handsome men seem to always have long, clean-cut faces and sad eyes."

"Go on," Mona pleaded.

"Well," Joan said, resignedly. "I'll go on with the story, Mona dear, but it is nice to 'sidetrack,' as Rodney calls it. For the sake of my own feelings I shall call both the hermit doctor and the maiden beautiful, as they lived in joy supreme until the villain comes upon the scene and with one blow of his evil breath smites their fond hearts asunder.

"He—I mean the villain, now—carries the beautiful bride away and hides her in a lonely prison until she dies of a broken heart. Then the villain tells the beautiful man that he may as well cease his search for his lost joy, up and down and to and fro on the face of the earth, for the beautiful bride

is dead. The villain will not even tell the beautiful man where the body of the heart-broken maiden rests—so the sorrowful husband turns his face toward the setting sun and no man from that day has known his name. I have sometimes thought there might have been a beautiful, golden-haired child come to cheer the broken-hearted maiden, but it seemed so perfectly heartless to kill it off, as I should have been obliged to, for even a villain would not have been so hard-hearted as to have kept a little child from the heart-broken husband after the beautiful bride was dead.”

“It sounds lovely,” sighed Mona. “I don’t see how you ever imagine such things, Joan.”

“It’s easy, Mona, dear. You could imagine perfectly fascinating things if you would only cultivate your imagination. I know you dream beautiful things. I wish you would tell me some of them.”

Mona smiled at her. “You tell; Mona listen.”

“Shall I tell you the fairy tale I have imagined for the close of school?” Joan sprang to her feet, quivering with excitement.

“Yes, yes,” Mona cried, eagerly.

“You know I am to speak the Fern piece, Mona?”

Mona nodded, her lips parted in a little half

smile. She had listened to Joan recite the Fern piece at least fifty times.

“ Well, the other day, Miss Reeves asked me to tell a fairy tale of my own besides the Fern piece which, as you know, comes right at the beginning of the programme. Miss Reeves says I may choose any of those I have been telling Friday afternoons, but I shall give an entirely new one—one that will surprise even Miss Reeves. I am sure Mr. Arth is at the bottom of the whole affair. He has always wanted all the boys at the Major’s to hear some of the fairy tales I have imagined in the past and all the boys are coming to the exercises. I am afraid I shall have stage fright, Mona, but I shall try to do my best for Rodney’s sake. I want you, too, and Mr. Arth and Miss Reeves to be proud of my achievement. I shall spend the last half hour, before the exercises, in prayer. I am sure that will strengthen me. I am sure the Major will be there, and I would rather die an untimely death than to fail before him. I know the Lord says: ‘ Love your enemies,’ and I feel instinctively that the Major is my enemy. I felt it even before this coldness sprang up that exists between him and Aunt Prudence. Impossible as it may seem for people of their age to fall in love, I believe the Major is in love with Aunt Prudence or at least he has pretended to be

in love with her. For a time I think she reciprocated his affections, but she does not seem to like him at all now.

"Any one could tell at a glance that they were not kindred souls, and it is a mistake for any one to love one who is not a kindred soul, Mona, dear.

"Rodney says Mr. Welch is in love with Aunt Prudence, really and truly in love, and I am sure if Aunt Prudence is going to take unto herself a husband at her time of life I hope for her own sake she takes Mr. Welch. Mr. Welch is a good man, Mona."

"What is the fairy tale?" Mona interrupted. Mona could not even imagine the austere Prudence a bride.

"This is the story of The Silver Squirrel," Joan said, dreamily, settling herself back down on the blanket.

"Come, Don, you must listen," she commanded, as Don dashed into the cave.

Don possessed a sense of duty. He lay down beside her, and struggled hard to keep his eyes open—tried to remain alert, but was fast asleep almost before the story began.

"Oh, that is beautiful," Mona cried, when Joan finished.

When they reached home in the mystic twilight, the express package, from the hermit doctor, had arrived.

Joan watched Rodney pry the lid off the box, in reverent, silent expectancy. Mona, from her seat in a shadowy corner, dreamily watched the face of her friend, alive with anticipation.

At last the cover was off the box and Rodney held out two tissue-wrapped parcels.

Joan opened her package with trembling fingers, while Mona held hers in her arms and crooned softly over it, as Joan, having opened her package, shook out a filmy white dress—a dress that was a dainty thing of pin tucks and lace ruffles.

“There is a note pinned to it,” Prudence remarked, having observed more closely than the others.

“Oh! Oh!” Joan panted, her breath coming short and fast.

Prudence feigned to be contemptuously setting the supper table, but nevertheless had watched the scene out of the corner of her eye with an ill-concealed air of interest.

“Yes, read the note, Joan,” Rodney prompted, his eyes shining.

“After Mona opens her present,” Joan returned, in an awed little voice.

"Yes, open yours, Mona," commanded Prudence, her voice icy. "Joan will not be able to enjoy her dress with her usual complete abstraction unless your dress—I suppose that is what it is—has the same number of tucks in it."

"Open yours quickly, Mona," Rodney urged.

Mona's fingers trembled as she opened her parcel, but her face was inscrutably expressionless, save for the great glowing eyes.

Mona's package proved to contain a dress the exact duplicate of Joan's, except it was some longer and a little larger in size.

"Why, Joan, what is it?" Rodney demanded, as Joan started toward him, eyes misty with tears, then suddenly dashed around on the side of the table opposite him.

"Oh! Oh! I am so happy, Rodney. Oh! Rodney! Rodney! I am so happy!" Joan laid her dress across a chair and turned radiant but misty eyes to Rodney.

"I came very near bursting into tears on your shirt front after promising Aunt Prudence this very afternoon that I would be careful in the future. I am glad I never cried on you this time, Rodney. And now I think I am sufficiently controlled to read the note."

The note ran:

"I believe little girls always wear fluffy white dresses on the last day of school. I send these to you and Mona in memory of the night Mona came for me on King Solomon—the night I found you at Arth's. I am sure your guardian will not grudge me this pleasure.

"THE HERMIT DOCTOR."

"Oh, how perfectly lovely!" Joan cried. "I am so happy. I hope this is not all a happy dream—but every good thing has been real since I came to you, Rodney."

Rodney held out his arms, as she fluttered toward him for an instant.

"I suppose I'd better not." She retreated with a wry little smile. "I'm shivering all over with happiness and I might burst into tears if I was too near you."

Rodney looked at his aunt reproachfully.

Prudence turned away, a grim little smile twitching at her lips.

"Come on to supper," she said, tartly. "Yes, ask Mona to stay," she responded to the wistful look in Joan's eyes. "There is no use in my trying to use judgment and discretion with you when every one else is determined to spoil you."

"I don't see how I'm ever going to eat, even your delicious cooking, Aunt Prudence. I know I am

not up to your standard of a good little girl, but I just can't be prim and sedate, no matter how hard I try, when I am so perfectly happy as I am. When is Dad coming back?" she turned to Rodney. "I feel that he and Mr. Arth must see our dresses to-night."

"Well, eat your supper now," was Prudence's crisp reply. "I will do the dishes to-night. You will have time to show your dress to Mr. Arth and the teacher, too. When does Miss Reeves leave?" she asked of Rodney. The next instant she regretted mentioning the leaving of Miss Reeves for her summer vacation, because Joan instantly burst into tears. She felt that she could not bear even the thought of not seeing her beloved teacher for more than three months.

Not until she saw Arth did Joan remember her disappointment that the hermit doctor's letter was not from Arth's wife. When she looked into his pale face, she most bitterly reproached herself for her delight in the dainty dress, and that night sobbed herself to sleep because of her selfishness in being happy when he was miserable.

The last day of school came at last. In mid-afternoon the closing exercises were held.

When Rodney complimented Joan on her appearance, as she stood expectant before him, she

stood on tiptoe and flung vehement arms about his neck.

"Oh, Rodney! Rodney! I do love to have you think I look nice. Of course I know I shall never be a perfectly ravishing beauty like Mona is, but I do love to look nice to you. Your opinion means everything in the whole world to me." Now there came a liquid vibration to her words like the quiver of a thrush's note.

Rodney caught her to him. A pang, which he tried to banish as unworthy of him, went through him and lingered with a haunting sense of regret because the fluffy dress, that enhanced the spiritual look of the child, had not been his gift instead of the gift of a man whose name he did not even know, yet he counted the man his friend.

"You look very neat, and if you behave as a proper child should you'll be a credit to Rodney, but don't give us any giant nonsense." Prudence ended her speech with a sound that might have been a grunt of disdain or a sniff of appreciation.

Prudence was gaunt and gray, endowed with numerous angles, but Joan, walking between her and Rodney, was very proud of the middle-aged woman in her rustling gray silk dress. To please Prudence, Joan tried to keep her restive feet atune with Prudence's sedate walk, but it was impossible.

In spite of her, her feet would dance in a very exuberance of joy, all the way down the sandy road to the schoolhouse.

But when she stood facing her audience, an hour later, she was, as she afterward expressed it, "frightfully weak-kneed." The stage fright lasted only an instant. Joan caught a mocking gleam in the Major's eyes, and, as it had once before, it now spurred her on to an achievement of which Rodney was justly proud.

Rodney played his violin that day—played stirring patriotic hymns they all knew. The violin throbbed and thrilled with delightful little love songs that flew straight to the heart with thrilling, answering intensity.

Dad Sherwood gave a beautiful and whimsically humorous address—and the old minister had, in his native city been famous for his gift of humor.

Lois and four college boys, rapidly recovering their health, gave a comical little farce that brought the house down.

Joan told the tale of the Silver Squirrel and was vigorously applauded.

To please Arth, who was there, very pale and weak, Lois closed the programme with a poem written by herself, which Arth had read that month in a Los Angeles magazine.

Lois gave the poem in a somewhat shaky voice, because the effort was her own, but she looked so sweet and winsome that Rodney wished the hermit doctor were there to see her. Rodney had caught the light in the doctor's eyes, brought there by Lois, and he had read the light aright.

While Lois spoke, Joan held tight to Rodney's hand, breathing sharply to keep from crying then and there because her beloved teacher was going away in the morning for three long months.

So the shuttle of life ever flies swiftly to and fro—weaving and interweaving threads of pleasure and pain in the strange web of life.

CHAPTER XIV

JULY came with a glare of heat. Waves of heat rolled in like billows across the white, shadowless desert that stretched itself in glistening, heat-parched grandeur between Rainbow Springs and the station seven miles away.

Day by day the sun-struck air lay somnolent, unquivering under the serene sapphire sky, but the nights were cool, under their jeweled canopies.

Joan spent the greater part of each heat-bound day with Arth, who grew steadily weaker until even the child knew the end was near.

Sam Welch spent the nights with the sick man and was as tender with him as a woman could have been.

The evenings Rodney and Joan spent in the saddle. Sometimes Mona accompanied them, but more often they went alone. Usually they had no particular goal as to the course they took, leaving the choice with Joan's Shetland pony, which she had christened Pegasus, after much consideration of the subject. The name was a misnomer. This Pegasus was a slow, plodding little beast, with a manner that suggested that he had grown weary of

the civilization in which he had played a part before Rodney had him brought to the desert oasis from Los Angeles. Each evening, as if atavistically recalling scenes of some former wildness, he always took to the trails that led up some wild canyon, on being given free rein.

On these trips Joan wove many fancies while she and Rodney rode in silence. Twilight on the desert is the time for silence as the desert itself is the place for reflection.

Rodney and Joan never tired of the infinite variety of the desert's colorings, ever changing according to the hour and the atmospheric condition. The mountains were almost irresistibly alluring, now tinted with a glorious sapphire, now purple-veiled, now shadowy, moon-tipped outlines.

It was after one of these rides, they found Welch at the cottage with a telegram for Joan. Rodney opened the yellow envelope with trembling fingers. At that moment he thought some ill had happened the hermit doctor, but the message was from Jeanette Arth, and read:

"MISS JOAN WORTHINGTON,

"Rainbow Springs, Cal.

"Received your letter in Paris—will reach Rainbow Springs to-night.

"JEANETTE ARTH."

When Rodney had finished reading the message, Joan dashed into her room, banging the door behind her.

"What now, I wonder?" Rodney exclaimed. "I thought she would take the direction of Arth's."

"I suppose she went in there to pray some of her thankfulness out," Prudence returned, dryly. "I have tried hard enough, goodness knows, to teach her that praying before people is not just the thing. She goes to her room now when she gets prayer-struck. I've broken her of her eternal quoting of the Bible, too," Prudence added, with a self-satisfied sniff.

"Well, now, I like to hear the little thing pray. She quotes Scripture down there every day and we enjoy it," Welch said, wagging his head in the direction of Arth's cottage.

"Humph!" Prudence snorted. "I don't know who spoils her the most."

"She couldn't be spoiled," Welch returned, as Joan entered the room. She had, as Prudence said, gone to offer up a prayer of gratitude.

"Holy smoke!" Welch ejaculated, struck by a sudden thought, and losing for an instant his sorrowful air. "When is she to come, Rodney?"

"To-night." Rodney scanned the telegram again.

"Well, I'll hike right over for her—want to

come along, young lady? Seeing as she wouldn't be here but for you, I reckon you should go 'long."

"She'd better go to bed," Prudence snapped. Nevertheless, it was Prudence who helped Joan get ready for the trip while Welch hitched up.

It was decided that Rodney should prepare Arth for his wife's coming.

They found Arth's wife pacing up and down the little station platform, eagerly awaiting some one to take her to the Springs—and Arth.

Jeanette Arth was a graceful little, bird-like person—a lovely fashioning of God.

"Oh, please, please don't let me be too late!" she prayed over and over, as she waited alone on the little deserted station platform, her lips tight-pressed with pain.

Joan never forgot that ride across the desert with Jeanette Arth's hand tightly clasping her's, while she told Arth's wife of Arth as she knew him.

"I can never repay you for what you have done for Billie—never, never!" Jeanette cried, when Joan had finished. The barking of the Indian dogs now heralded the nearness of the village.

"There is no question of pay," Joan returned stiffly, drawing her hand away.

Jeanette Arth impulsively drew the child to her.

"Dear little girl, I did not mean money pay—I mean a repayment in love and gratitude!"

Joan snuggled close to the dainty little woman. "I will be glad to have you love me," she said, winsomely. "I instinctively felt that you were a kindred spirit when Mr. Arth first mentioned you. When I saw you at the station I was sure of it. I sorrowfully feared I was mistaken a minute ago, but I am thrilling with happiness now I understand your meaning."

Jeanette kissed the child just as Welch drew rein in front of Arth's shack.

"He lives here," Welch said, succinctly.

"This will be the happiest moment of the dear man's life," Joan cried, as she sprang out of the carriage.

"You go in first," Jeanette returned, in a quavering voice. A band of fear had suddenly tightened about her heart. Oh, if she should be too late—too late to tell him she had always loved him—to tell him how she had traveled night and day ever since Joan's letter reached her in Paris where she had gone in a vain attempt to stifle her longing for him! Oh, how she prayed for time enough in which to tell him she had not known of his sickness until that letter came—if she had

known she would have been with him and shared his suffering !

She stood silent, almost frozen with fear while Joan dashed into the cottage.

Joan came flying out almost instantly, eyes alight, face aglow in the moonlight like the face of some ethereal creature. "He's better this evening than he has been for months," Joan panted. "He is waiting for you. Hurry, please, hurry! Rodney told him. He is waiting for you. Oh, hurry! Hurry!"

"Yes—I'll—hurry." Jeanette Arth's tongue almost refused to frame the words. She felt suddenly very weak and faint and was exceedingly glad of the child's aid to the door.

It seemed years before she could cross the threshold—an eternity of time before she had her arms about the gaunt, eager-eyed man, who held out pitiful shrunken arms to her.

"Oh, I am so happy," Joan cried, as she and Rodney went home, leaving the two alone together.

The angel of death hovered over the little cottage that night where joy and sorrow mingled together in a sweet, plaintive melody. In the early morning, when the sky was threaded with the rose tints of dawn, death entered and went forth not alone.

The old minister was passing the cottage at the time. He went in in answer to the cry of the woman. Dad Sherwood had been at many death-bed scenes, but never had his sympathies been, as now, worked to their highest pitch.

The presence that lingers after death seemed to fill the little room with an almost unsupportable majesty, oppressing him like the weight of many waters.

He stood silent and bowed, sorrowful, for a time looking down on the majestic outlines of the form of his friend. A few minutes later his face was glorified and he began to comfort the woman who had not been too late to give unspeakable joy to the man she had always loved.

"Try not to grieve so," he said, tenderly, laying his slender hand on the shaking figure of the woman kneeling beside her dead. "Can you not, at a time like this, unburden your heart to the Man of Sorrows?" he pleaded.

The answer was a moaning cry.

"He wants to comfort and strengthen you," he pleaded, his beautiful, silver voice strong, yet caressing.

To his infinite relief the woman moved away from the bed and looked out over the strength-giving desert.

He followed her to the window.

"It typifies the majesty and power of God," he said, his eyes following hers across the desert vastness.

He laid a hand light as a moonbeam on her head.

"I'll go now, leaving you in the hands of God. Later I shall send the child to you."

He did not call Joan's name, but the woman knew he meant the child who had brought her to her husband.

"Please send her now," she pleaded.

The old man's face brightened with a divine light.

"I go now thankfully," he returned, leaving the woman alone to glide instantly into one of those strange experiences where all that happens seems preordained, a repetition of something that happened in another existence centuries before. A rare experience in which she saw clearly, for an instant, all the patterns the flying shuttles of life had woven in the tapestry of her past life with Arth—saw dimly the swiftly-moving shuttles weaving broken patterns on the filmy mesh of the future—patterns that at last were perfect in another life where broken threads were tied and on the tapestry of that far-off future life she and Arth walked side by side.

Two days later, the old minister opened the little

church for the funeral. The old minister, ever since his talk with Joan about opening the church, had planned to begin holding regular services there as soon as the months of extreme heat were over and the village began to fill up again.

There were only a few white people in the village now. The Major did not have a single guest. Almost all the sick folk went to a cooler climate during the summer months.

Rodney had stayed at the Springs during the summer because his friend, the noted physician, advised it. He was willing to stay. He loved the desert—loved the quiet little oasis. And, since she was so happy there, he could not have taken Joan away from Arth these last weeks.

Rodney and Joan sat by Jeanette Arth that day in the little church and the woman held tight to Joan's hand, seeming to derive strength from the answering pressure of the child's slim fingers.

Joan kept her eyes fixed on the minister's face.

"There is no death," rang out the silver voice.

Joan felt suddenly enveloped in a triumphant, enfolding peace. As the minister's voice flowed on with an almost divine thrill in it, she could see glistening white-robed angels hovering over the casket at his feet.

She could see, in her fancy, the shadowy angel

forms rise higher and higher until she had to raise her head to see them—with a glad thrill of joy, she saw Arth among them. She leaned back and looked up, up, all the pent-up faith of the centuries surging through her open heart, as she saw the roof of the church rent asunder and the blue sky above open to receive its own.

Her face seemed to Rodney to be transfigured, as he looked into it before he started forward to add his tribute to his friend.

Softly upon the close of the minister's tribute to life came the voice of the violin full of deep chords and splendid running notes of triumph over that which is called death but is only transition.

Jeanette had heard the greatest musical artists of the world, but she had never listened to such playing before.

It counseled acceptance of the life that lay before her. It whispered of resignation because of the life that had gone to the great beyond. It promised divine restitution throughout countless ages after this brief earth-span of life had been merged into that higher life that lies beyond the grave.

Her individual grief sank into insignificance, as the violin spoke softly of those who know not of the life that is for those who believe, as it mourned for the unbelief of the world of sin.

Something vast and appealing took the place of her own sorrow and heart-break, and in the greatness of it came peace and understanding. It seemed that her beloved no longer lay dead but was alive, vitally alive, as she should be alive—divinely alive—some day.

And the voice of the violin sang on and on in deep, quivering tones that were a part of the beauty of the whole world. The sound of many waters ran through it and on their rippling waves there came a revelation of the working of the divine law that deals with the infinite—came an understanding of the power of the infinite love that shelters the finite world—that whispers softly to the heart of each individual, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

When the last note of the violin died away, the old minister's voice rang out in a musical benediction.

And so it happened that the little cortége which followed William Arth to his resting place, under a great pepper tree, just as the sunset flames encircled the mountains in a myriad of tints, were filled with a great peace and a sublime understanding of the infinite love.

The following morning, Jeanette Arth went East, to devote the rest of her life and her wealth to

those who had need of her—to those of whom the violin had spoken.

After the departure of Arth's wife, the little village settled down again to its heat-bound quiet.

The old minister, Welch and his sister Martha, Prudence, Rodney, and Joan were the only white people now at the Springs. The Major was away on a secret mission of his own. The Major had learned the reason of Chawa's absence from the village and was trying to locate the half-breed lad.

September brought with it cooler days. It also brought the Major with a new Cuban negro cook and a horde of guests.

Lois Reeves returned during the first week of the month and Joan was all athrill with the joy of her beloved teacher's presence in the village. There were four new white pupils that term. Joan welcomed their advent with her usual impulsiveness, but the days of her happiness in them were few.

The four children were of two different families, and lived, with their parents, in two of the Major's cottages.

From the Major, the parents of the children learned that Joan was an orphan, Mona, her chum, a half-breed.

Tom and Gertie Peyson would have treated Joan and Mona kindly—they were much taken with the

two girls—but Maud and Bert Ward, with whom they had chummed in an Eastern town, had a shrewish and gossiping mother.

The Major had found what Joan would have called a kindred spirit in Mrs. Ward. He told her a delightfully scandalous tale of Joan's recent adoption by Rodney White. He accompanied his narrative with many suggestive winks and deprecative waves of his pudgy hands until he had his reward—the woman in a whirl of righteous indignation silenced the protests of her invalid husband and commanded Bert and Maud to shun Joan and the half-breed.

The Major had brought Mona into the lime-light, labeling her an improper associate of a white child.

"I shall start a school of my own here, in a few months," the Major advanced, pompously. "Not a government school, run by a government-appointed teacher who encourages the intermingling of Indians and white children."

The Major was much incensed at Lois these days. Fired by her winsome womanliness, the first day after her return to the Springs he had magnanimously offered to share himself and "The Sign of the Rainbow" with her. Lois had refused the magnificent offer in no uncertain terms. This had in a measure increased his ire at Joan, unjust as

that was. He likewise detested the child more each day because each day he was less certain of ever winning the wary Prudence.

The following day, after the Major's evening spent at the Wards' in slurring Joan, the child came home from school, dejected and spiritless, utterly unlike the Joan Rodney loved with every fiber of his being.

"What is it, little girl?" Rodney asked, as she passed him silently. She, who usually was overflowing with laughter and impulsive recountings of the happenings of the school hours.

"Nothing," Joan answered, in a lifeless little voice, as she went into her room.

Rodney knew she had gone into her room to pray—knew that she would come to him as soon as she had received the comfort she sought.

"What can have happened?" he murmured, over and over, as he restlessly paced the room. He had just decided to go to Lois Reeves to find the cause of the trouble when Joan came out to him. There was a certain look of peace on her face and her eyes were not so set and staring as they had been when she entered the house.

"What is it, dear?" Rodney demanded, as she perched, in her favorite place, on his chair arm.

She caught his hands in hers and held them

tightly while she told in a quivering voice of the slights and insults she had suffered from the young Wards that day and of the influence the Ward children had on the sturdier, stauncher Tom and Gertie.

Rodney's eyes flashed ominously from time to time, but he said not a word as the quivering little voice went on, adding to his hatred of the Major, for Rodney knew where to place the injustice of it all.

He caught himself up sharply, as Joan said: "I took all their slights of me with a Christian fortitude of which I am sure you would have been proud."

He drew her close to him in loving proof of his pride of her in all things.

She faltered an instant, then continued, and her voice was firmer now: "When they began on Mona, I simply boiled over. I could not stand them calling her a 'greaser.' She looked so crushed, poor little wilted flower. I didn't see anything but mad red for a while, they were so mean to her, and at last I could not stand it any longer, so I simply sailed in on them just as school was called after recess. I had the drawing stick in my hand and I lammed them all over the head with it. I hit every one of them, Rodney. Miss Reeves had been

out in the yard and had not heard much of the trouble, so could not understand why I was hitting them, when she came in with Flying Eagle and Marina.

"Oh! Oh!" she wailed. "Miss Reeves was so hurt. She stood me in the corner all the rest of the afternoon. I broke the drawing stick over Bert's head, you know, so something had to be done with me. Miss Reeves was very sweet about it all, and I forgave her right at the time for not punishing the others—I could not tell her about the trouble. Of course, Mona tried to, but Miss Reeves thought she was only going to take my part, so she would not listen—she asked the other children to explain and they would not, so she just looked sad and told me she was extremely sorry to have to punish me, but she must keep order in the school or she would not be doing her duty.

"I told her I understood her position thoroughly and would forgive her any indignity she heaped upon me. I assured her she would understand the whole matter after I talked to you. Miss Reeves did not say a word, but her lips quivered and my heart almost broke because I had hurt her, but I could not tell her about it until I came to you, could I, Rodney?"

"No, little girl," he answered, understandingly.

Joan sighed and snuggled closer to him. "I cannot understand Mona," she said, wistfully. "When Miss Reeves told her to keep quiet, Mona got up and marched out of the schoolhouse with her head high like some beautiful outraged princess. If she had only stayed where I could have looked into her soulful eyes it would have helped me, but Mona is so odd at times."

"I will go now, and straighten the whole matter out," Rodney said, briskly. "You run along to the Cave of Rest—take Don with you, I fancy Mona is there waiting for you."

"Oh, Rodney! You have lifted such a burden from my heart; I am sure Mona is there, but I never dreamed of it until you spoke. I feared I had lost her forever, and it would almost kill me to lose Mona, Rodney, dear. I knew you would straighten everything out," she whispered, gratefully, rubbing her cheek against his.

The Major never forgot the interview he had with Rodney. Rodney's first call was upon the Major, with the letter the Major had written Judge Wheaton, and which the Judge had sent to Rodney to show him the Major's true character, if such a warped nature could possess a character of any kind.

When shown his own letter, the Major cowered low in his chair, muttering an apology which made

Rodney's lips curl contemptuously. "All's fair in love or war, my boy," the Major whimpered. "When I wrote that letter, and the devil alone knows how you got hold of it, I thought if I could find out anything against the child I might cause a separation between you and your aunt. I knew you would stick to the child even then, and you seem more loony over her than ever now. I thought she might be yours until I wrote the letter, and that if I could prove it and cause the separation between you and your aunt, your aunt would naturally turn to me. She seemed to be rather taken with me then. Curse it all, I can't see what has come over her lately."

"You do not deserve the reason," Rodney said, sharply, "but the reason lies in the fact that my aunt saw you in the Indian powwow—you remember the night, you made enough out of your devil of a horse that day to remember the date for some time."

From the Major's lips there poured forth a string of sulphurous oaths that surprised even Rodney, knowing the man as he thought he knew him.

"Excitement often brings on apoplexy," Rodney said, in grim humor, as he left the Major's profane presence.

The Major watched Rodney cross the lawn to

the cottages where dwelt the Wards and Peysons, a malevolent light in his beady eyes. Then he cursed violently, profanely as he started across the desert to the station. At the station he met a tall, slender youth in conventional American garb—a youth with the flashing eyes of the untamed savage.

The Major cursed anew, as he drew near the youth, but his voice, when he addressed the arrogant lad, was oily, flattering, soothing. "The time is not ripe, Chawa, my lad," he said, unctuously. "I made a mistake in allowing you to come to-day. She is too young yet, Chawa."

The half-breed faced the Major, his flashing eyes burning with the savage desire of his restless, untamed spirit.

Those flashing eyes made the Major feel very uncomfortable. He laid his hand on the straight, haughty shoulders.

Chawa flung him off impatiently.

"You must return quickly," the Major whined. "I tell you, my boy, I should not have allowed you to come so soon. You are young, I have done much for you, am willing to do more, if you will wait in patience only two short years, I swear by all the Great Spirits of your race, for you are all Indian, my Chawa, that I will be true to you and give you your heart's desire. Trust me, Chawa lad, and

humor an old man's whim. In two years that fool guardian of hers will be entirely well. Curse him, he grows stronger every day. In two years you will be completely Americanized—in appearance," he chuckled. "In two years the man will love her even better than he does now, your victory over him will be more sweet, and—and, you are shrewd, Chawa, my revenge will be more complete, if we wait two years."

"So!" Chawa's lips curled back from his perfect teeth. "You want more revenge on the white-faced man who loves her in his puny way, do you? What is his love to the love that burns in the heart of Chawa? What is your desire for revenge compared to the desire that throbs through the veins of Chawa? Why should I, Chawa, wait two years that he, the pale-faced weakling, may love her more?—I care not how much he loves her—I care only that she belongs to me.

"Why should I wait two years for you to treasure revenge in your heart—why should I? Answer, and do not forget that the blood of the great Fighting Wolf flows in the blood of Chawa—the half-breed." He drew himself up proudly.

The Major came close to the half-breed and whispered something into his ear.

The hot blood flooded up under the dark cheeks,

but the flashing eyes that burned in the perfectly chiseled face were not lowered, their untamable light mocked the Major, yet the Major knew his cause was won, by the twitching of the dark lips.

"So!" Chawa said, when the Major had finished and turned away with a triumphant light in his beady eyes.

"You will go back on the midnight train?" the Major asked, after a long silence, during which the half-breed restlessly paced the station platform.

"No," Chawa returned, proudly. "I shall see the witch-child before I sleep. Child she may be, too young for Chawa now she may be, but Chawa's fit mate, and Chawa shall see her before he sleeps. Come, old man, let us hasten to your den of iniquity. When I leave, I shall give you my answer as to the length of time I shall wait for my mate. I, Chawa, shall watch and see if you have told Chawa the truth."

So unknown to all but the Major, Chawa spent three weeks in the little village—weeks of torture for the Major, whose hatred of Rodney grew in leaps and bounds.

At the end of the three weeks, Chawa returned to the Eastern city to add to the cloak of civilization that wrapped itself in deceiving folds about his savage spirit.

When Rodney returned from the Wards' and Peysons' the night of his exposure of the Major, he found Joan, curled upon the porch cot, sobbing as if her heart would break. Mona was neither at the Cave of Rest nor at any other place known to Joan.

"She's gone off to die of a broken heart, I know she has," Joan wailed on Rodney's shirt front, in entire forgetfulness of her promise to Prudence to refrain from that luxury.

"Stuff and nonsense!" Prudence sniffed, when she had drawn from Rodney as much of the tale as he cared for her to know. "I am sure I don't see, Joan, why you want to stir up another Indian mess for, anyway," Prudence added, tartly.

"There is no mess, Aunt Prudence," Rodney returned stiffly, drawing Joan closer to him. "Joan simply took her friend's part as one of her nature was bound to take it and——"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Prudence. "When I was growing up, there was not so much talk about nature and temperament. Children were not excused for everything they did, as you excuse and pamper Joan. Her nature—pouff! If she ever amounts to shucks it will be a wonder," and Prudence flounced out of the room.

"Don't mind her, little girl," Rodney comforted. "She feels badly because the Major is such a dis-

appointment to her." Rodney unconsciously hit upon the head the nail of truth. The Major had been the first swain to approach her little garden of middle-age romance and it hurt Prudence to learn of the Major's imperfections. She did not trust him, herself—had secretly feared him since the night of the Indian powwow—still she looked at him through eyes yet filmy with the glamor of romance.

"I don't mind Aunt Prudence any more—she is so good at heart. I know it's hard on her to find the Major out. I think I should die if I ever found any secret evil in Mona. Aunt Prudence is so good to me, I love her no matter how cross she seems at times. I am a great trial to her, I know I am, Rodney," Joan whispered, softly.

After a time the child fell asleep, and Rodney sat there, holding her in his arms until all the desert world was enveloped in the mystic glow of a yellow autumn moon.

Mona came to school the following morning, a triumphant light in her great eyes. Joan embraced her rapturously, whispering loving greetings in her ears. Lois Reeves caught the half-savage gleam of triumph in the little half-breed's eyes and wondered at it. It was the first savage look she had ever seen in Mona's eyes.

Very sorry was Lois Reeves over her punish-

ment of Joan the previous afternoon. She regretted, too, that she had refused to allow Mona to speak. From Rodney she had heard the true story of the Major's perfidity, had even read the Major's letter to Judge Wheaton.

With an arm about each of the two girls, Lois told them of her regret over the unkindness of the four children. Joan responded impulsively, loving as ever. Mona was quieter, more reserved, yet her eyes were very tender and soft as they met her beloved teacher's. Mona held nothing against Miss Reeves. Lois knew the little half-breed forgave her, yet she was puzzled and troubled by that half-barbaric gleam in the great gray eyes until the Ward and Peyson children arrived.

There was a livid welt on the cheeks of each of the four children and in their eyes for many days there lingered a shadow of fear—a fear of the intangible—a fear of that unknown something that had awakened each of them in the middle of the night by a stinging lash on the face with a keen whip.

Very subdued and very respectful were they to Mona and Joan all the rest of the term, but Joan never renewed her former good-fellowship with them. She treated them with an unvarying kindness and courtesy, but even at that age Joan had the

power of erecting an invisible, impassable wall between her and those with whom she did not choose to become intimate. Mona ignored the four white children. To her it was as if they did not exist, had never existed.

Perhaps Lois Reeves was the only one in the village who ever guessed the real cause of the mysterious welts that remained on the faces of the four children a number of days.

Lois Reeves intuitively knew that at some time during the hours the village lay asleep, there had been a barbaric payment of the wrong done the chum of the little half-breed.

CHAPTER XV

THE desert lay serene and beautiful under a rose-tinted glow in the eastern sky. White clouds hung, poised like beautiful swans, in the deep blue of the western heavens.

Just to breathe was a delight that beautiful May morning, the air was so sweet with the breath of a desert spring. The night before, a last April shower had washed clean all the desert world.

The air vibrated with a jubilant melody of hope. Nature seemed gracious—generous—a-quiver with joy, and the scanty desert vegetation seemed to have been touched by a magic wand, so beautiful was it and so odorous, with that purely desert odor that invigorates and stimulates.

In tune to the desert symphony of color and song, and up the clean, sandy road toward the trail that led past the Indian burying ground—past the huge pepper tree under which Arth's white headstone glistened under the rose-tinted sky—towards the well-worn path that led to the Cave of Rest, went Joan that spring morning.

It was Joan's fifteenth birthday, and there was a

divine, mystic light in the eyes, azure as the sky above to which their clear glance was uplifted. Her hair was gold-tinted, caressed as it was by the shooting rays of the morning sun. The mysterious half-light of the coming day touched the girl's face into an ethereal, Madonna-like beauty. Strong and brave and kind was Joan's face, with its signals of pride set about the mouth, and in the very poise of her well-carried head.

She walked with a certain boyish stride, as Rosalind might have walked in Arden.

When she reached the twin palms she turned and looked down on the village revealed by the mystic morning glow.

"Oh, this is good!" She drew in deep breaths of the spring-scented air. "Oh, it's good, good to be alive!" Just to breathe seemed an exquisite joy to her as she flung herself down on the flat rock at the base of the twin palms.

The gleaming desert sand was fanned by perfume-laden zephyrs; the call of a mocking bird vibrated on the still morning air.

Joan's eyes kindled with delight as she listened an instant, then turned and tried to count the tent-houses dotted all about on the desert from the northern part of the village to the many-hued mountains piercing the sky.

She thrilled with joy, as she leaned eagerly forward, her eyes on the door of Rodney's cottage. The door opened, and Rodney himself came out on the porch and shaded his eyes with his hand, as he scanned the sandy road for a glimpse of her.

Her lips parted in a little half-smile of sheer delight, as he saw her, perched up there on the rock—a blur of white against the green of the palms—and waved his handkerchief at her. She laughed aloud, and the rippling music of it was as sweet as the call of the mocking bird, as the man started up the trail toward her, walking with the long swinging strides of a man in almost perfect health.

Her heart gave a glad, exultant throb, then the hot color flooded her face up to her hair roots until she became so conscious of it that she put her hand up as though to shade her eyes from the light.

When she looked up again at the rugged mountain peaks, on the ragged spur of one of the peaks, outlined against the rose-hued sky, was the grim head of a bygone Indian chief.

"Oh, oh!" she breathed, ecstatically, "we saw that the first morning we were here."

The head of the Indian chief faded from the sky, and a beautiful pearly cloud drifted across the rugged peak.

To Joan it seemed as if her future was folded and hidden in the beautiful mist.

A marvelous change had taken place in Rainbow Springs since Joan witnessed with Rodney the first mirage of the head of the Indian chief.

Two years before Joan's fifteenth birthday morning, surveyors had come across from the desert station. For days they had stretched their tape over the glittering sand, and jotted down figures in their leather-backed note-books.

When they had gone, a horde of workmen came and for many days the sound of hammer and saw rang and hissed with the song of progress, while as if by magic scores of tent-houses sprang up like leopard spots on the desert's welcoming heart. The tents were flanked about a huge rambling building, its myriad of windows giving it a pavilion-like air.

This building, known as the Hall of Hope, stood on the spot where once had stood Welch's modest hostelry and the unpainted cottages. The government schoolhouse and the little drab-colored church were the only buildings in the entire northern portion of the village that had been there when Joan and Mona made their first trip to the Cave of Rest.

The hermit doctor was the magician back of the transformation, and every one revered him as a benefactor.

The Hall of Hope was a splendid building, with a vast dining-room, and clean, white-tiled kitchens, snug offices and consulting-rooms for the doctor, and an immense room—the hall—for the tent-dwellers. The hall abounded with couches and easy chairs circled about a grand piano.

Scattered about on low reading-tables were the latest magazines of helpful character, and numbers of the late books of hopeful, cheerful nature. In the corner of the hall opposite the piano was a phonograph of inviting appearance, and on shelves back of it were any number of records.

The hall was the Mecca of joy to the many young men who came flocking to this model community where the maximum of all they needed was given them for a minimum of money.

The cost to the tubercular patients was so small in fact that even the poorest could come here and retain their gift of pride. The price there was to all the same, likewise the treatment accorded them was a replica of the motto over the entrance door, "Here all men are equal."

And the man who had, by means of his unlimited wealth, achieved all this, was rejuvenated. Not since his youth had he known the kind of sleep he now enjoyed. Not a day passed but he rejoiced in the work that rescued so many high-minded

youthful men from the clutches of their grim disease, and restored them to lives of usefulness. Surely this was a work worthy of his highest powers. The new cure was a wonder, and in his skilled hands a marvel to the outer world of science that looked on his great work and approved.

The old minister was very happy these days. He held daily readings and talks at the Hall of Hope. There the blessedness as well as the necessity of the altruistic life became intelligible by his simple presentation of the truth, and many a conversion followed. He taught the sick how to live as well as how to die, for some of them did die—those who came too late.

The old minister, Joan, and Mona had also achieved a wonderful garden of flowers and long sweeping plots of vegetables. Truly it could be said: the desert oasis was a full-blossomed rose, fragrant and fair to look upon.

The Major's hotel was deserted these days. He lived alone, surly and vindictive, with his superannuated Cuban negro cook.

The doctor had tried to purchase the Major's interest in the village, but the Major refused scornfully and pompously.

As Rodney climbed the trail to Joan, his heart beat with joy.

His love for Joan had grown apace with the years; he made no attempt to deceive himself. He loved her as a child, and he loved her as the one man loves the one woman.

He knew that Joan loved him with a love as great as his own, but he kept his man-love hidden far out of sight, believing that Joan loved him only as a child loves.

Some day he would awaken the woman-love that lay hidden under the child-love—that some day would be when there were five more years added to the fifteen.

“You missed the head of the Indian chief, and it was just like it was the first morning we were here,” was Joan’s greeting, as she made room for him on the flat rock beside her.

Rodney fanned his hot face with his hat, and mopped the moisture from his forehead.

“You should not have climbed up here so fast,” Joan said, reproachfully, her eyes soft with the maternal glow that shines in the eyes of every true woman.

Sometimes, as now, she seemed years older than Rodney.

Rodney laughed.

“But we are all to see the wonderful Cave of Rest to-day, and I wanted to see it first. Think

how long I have existed without seeing that enchanted spot. Shall we move on?"

"Not without Mona. I promised her I would wait for her, and she may not be here for an hour," Joan returned, softly, a wistful light in her eyes. She was sorry she had promised Mona to wait for her, yet the Cave of Rest was Mona's first, and Joan was loyal.

"I'll wait," Rodney said, with a low laugh. "It is good to see you once in a while without your shadow or those idolizing youths of the doctor's flocking eternally about you. Humph! Added another inch or so to the length of your dress, I see. You grow up mighty fast, young lady."

Joan touched the soft folds of the handsome skirt with caressing fingers.

"Yes, it is longer," she said, softly. "Wasn't Aunt Prudence a dear to make this dress for my birthday?"

"Aunt Prue is not so severe as she once was." Rodney shaded his eyes with his hat, and through half-closed lips watched the expressive face of the girl.

"Aunt Prudence is a dear, Rodney White."

"Well, she broke you of crying on my shirt front, and I'll never forgive her for that," he retorted, eying his shirt front pensively. "Besides,



SOME DAY HE WOULD AWAKEN THE WOMAN-LOVE THAT LAY HIDDEN
UNDER THE CHILD-LOVE.—*Page 323.*

I heard her telling you last night that you were too old to kiss me any more, I am indignant at her. There is a limit to even my forbearance."

Joan's clear laugh rang out like rippling water.

"What a comfort I took in crying on you!" She eyed him now, half wistfully. "I am too old for so many things," she said, with a trace of sadness in her low voice.

Rodney pulled a wavy lock of his heavy hair down on his forehead, and peered up at it critically.

"Gray—gray," he murmured, in mock sorrow. "Joan is getting too old for so many things, and I am decrepit with age."

He sighed, and shook his head mournfully.

"I am sorry for the poor old man," Joan mocked, her eyes dancing. "There is Chawa," she cried suddenly. "See! That is he, dashing across the desert towards the station.

In an instant Rodney's laughing manner was gone. He seemed suddenly and truly to cross the border line between maturity and old age.

"How long has he been here, Joan?"

"Over a week, and isn't he fine and romantic-looking in his American clothes. He is so tall and straight and beautiful. He looks like some statue of the bronze Mercury."

"I hate him," Rodney snarled, savagely.

The very thought of Chawa always sent a shiver of fear through him—fear not for himself, but a fear that seemed a shivering menace of some evil to come through Chawa to Joan. He was suddenly extremely sorry that he had not taken Joan East that spring. He was strong enough, but both he and the child loved the desert so that he hated to leave it or take her from it. She was so happy there.

“Why, Rodney White!” Joan’s voice dispelled his sudden reverie. “There is no room for hate on a day like this. Love is the only thing that owns to-day, Rodney dear.”

Rodney’s face softened. Chawa was now only a black dot dancing up and down in the distance.

“Mona told me last night that he stays at the Major’s. Isn’t that queer?”

A quick flash of understanding came into Rodney’s eyes.

“He stays at the Major’s, eh?” His voice sounded indifferent, but every nerve was a-quiver with interest—and added fear.

“Yes, Mona says he does. She asked him why. He told her it was for the same reason that she lives with Miss Reeves and Aunt Martha—because he is too civilized to stay with the Indians.”

Rodney gave a short laugh. He could almost see

the flashing savage light in Chawa's black eyes, and he knew it was not for the sake of civilization or any of its attributes that Chawa was hobnobbing with the Major.

"Mona is coming!" Joan gave a quick, happy cry, and dashed down the trail to meet her friend.

Rodney scowled as he watched the two girls come up the trail arm in arm. Mona had seventeen years of unsullied maidenhood to her credit. The soul of a brave, true-hearted woman looked out through her dark, mystic eyes, but Rodney could not forget that the blood of the great Fighting Wolf flowed through her veins—could not forget that she was the sister of Chawa.

When the two stood before him he still scowled, even though Mona standing there in the sunlight looked like an exquisite bit of tinted marble sculptured into perfectness by the hand of God. And he knew that Mona was as pure and true-hearted as the girl he loved with every fiber of his being.

"Where is Don?" Joan demanded, suddenly, as they made their way up the rest of the trail that lay between the twin palms and the Cave of Rest—a trail smoothed and hardened by the daily treading of it, by the two girls.

"Don is with Dad," Mona answered, her gray

eyes glowing with love, as they met Joan's laughing blue ones.

"I'll take his place at your feet, while you tell me a fairy story," Rodney offered, with a laugh and a mocking low bow. Rodney was himself again—he again trusted Mona the half-breed.

"We shall see about it," Joan flung back, as she disappeared into the coolness of the cave.

An instant later she emerged with flashing eyes.

"Some one has been here and spoiled it all," she panted. Her eyes were almost black with anger. Rodney smiled. He had secretly longed for more than a year to see the old flare of anger set its signals at the corner of that sensitive mouth.

Mona's eyes grew grave, serious, inscrutable. She understood now, Chawa's old time barbaric laugh of triumph, as he darted past her on his pony, his supple body bent low, in true Indian fashion.

Under his thin veneer of civilization, Chawa was the same untamed reincarnation of the great Fighting Wolf.

"What is the matter?" Rodney demanded.

Joan barred the entrance to the cave.

"Some one has been here and spoiled all our surprise for you," she sobbed. "I thought no one ever came here but Mona and I, and—and we spent hours yesterday decorating the inside of the cave

with palm leaves. We had Chinese lanterns all around the walls—I was going to light them just now, and they are gone—gone!” Her voice rose tragically. “Oh, oh,” she wailed. “I am so miserable, I shall have to cry—even the rugs and— and everything else are all gone. Oh, oh, I shall surely cry, and it is awful to cry on one’s fifteenth birthday.”

“My shirt front is at your service, fair maiden,” Rodney said, whimsically. “Come, use it for old time’s sake. I suggest, however, that we go inside your cave. It is becoming rather warm out here for a sick man.”

Joan smiled at him through her tears. “Poor sick man!” she mocked. “I never let myself believe you were sick, Rodney. I thought health for you every hour in the day. Not just as Miss Warren used to teach we should believe health, because I cannot believe just as she did. But I do believe, ‘As a man thinketh in his heart so he is.’ And I do believe thinking health for you helped.” She was serious now. The threatened April shower had given place to a bright May face. “We’ll make the best of our dismantled cave,” she flashed, suddenly. “There are plenty more lanterns at the house. You are so extravagant, Rodney White. Mona and I will go down and bring some things

up with the rest of the crowd. We shall have to imagine the decorations, but we can do that. Come on, Mona."

Rodney's face fell comically. "I fear to stay alone—wild beasts might come and devour me—some of the horde of giants you have conjured up here might steal me away while alone in my helplessness," he said, whimsically.

Joan laughed, and started down the trail.

Mona came close to Rodney. Her eyes were grave and troubled as they searched his suddenly-sobered face.

"You watch Joan," she whispered. "Chawa is here. He is very fierce—fiercer than he was when I warned you before. He loves Joan, but not as you love her. His love is the love of the tiger for its mate. Your love is as the love of an angel, true and gentle. Chawa is my brother—the same blood flows in our veins, but," she reached her arms skyward. "I once swore eternal love to my white friend. I love her, love her with the strong love of my Indian mother and with the tender love of my white father.

"I love her with every throb of my heart. The nights are sweet because she has been beside me through the day. The days are like glimpses of the heaven Dad tells about, because the days are

brightened by her smiles. I love our Joan with every fiber of my being—for her I would suffer any torture—for her I would give my life. You cannot understand how one with the blood of the Indian in them loves. I can understand Chawa, although Chawa is more of the red race than am I. Chawa is our great chief, Fighting Wolf, born again, so says the Chief Pedro.

“The white blood of our white father is submerged in the stronger current of the centuries of untamed blood that flows through Chawa’s veins. Chawa wears the raiment of the white race, but Chawa is not of them. There is not a full-blooded Indian on the Reservation as untamed and savage as is Chawa. You watch Joan. I watch Chawa.

“The Major is planning with Chawa to steal Joan. He would give Joan to Chawa—would mate the cactus with the rose. It shall not be. I, Mona, swear it by the God of my father, by the Great Spirits of my mother’s people.”

Like a flash she was gone. Rodney saw that she overtook Joan at the twin palms, and hand in hand they sped down the trail together, leaving him alone with a consuming fear for Joan.

It seemed that he was afire with hate of the Major and Chawa. At that moment he knew no reason; for a time he paced up and down in front of the

cave, unmindful of the heat, like a man suddenly bereft of reason. Calmness came with a sudden determination to seek Pedro on the morrow and see if he could again have Chawa sent away from the Reservation. If that plan failed he would take Joan East.

Long since had there ceased to be even a pretense of friendship between the oily Major and Rodney.

Prudence and Welch were planning to be married in the Fall, and were to live in Orion, in the square white house set back from the street, with a maple-bordered path running like a silver thread from the street to the door when the earth was snow and ice-bound as it was the night Joan came to the square white house in answer to the call of the violin.

Rodney threw himself down at last under the shade of the overhanging rocks half concealing the entrance to the cave. As he sat there eagerly awaiting the return of Joan, a shadow fell before him.

He looked up quickly, and for a second met the flashing, mockingly triumphant, savage eyes of Chawa.

"You devil!" Rodney snarled.

"Ah!" Chawa's red lips curled back from his firm, even teeth. "Devil I may be, but I shall win

from you the maiden of laughing eyes and sun-kissed hair. She shall be the mate of Chawa. I, Chawa, swear it. Bah! You watch Joan. Mona watch Chawa. So!" A triumphant leer distorted the handsome savage face, then the half-breed was gone.

Rodney sprang to his feet, his eyes searching the trail both above and below the cave, but there was no sign of the savage. He began to wonder if his eyes and his mind had been playing tricks on him. Hadn't he and Joan seen Chawa disappear over the desert toward the station just a short hour ago. How could Chawa be near the Cave of Rest? But the day was spoiled for him, nevertheless.

But no one noticed his preoccupation when there was no need for him to exert himself for the pleasure of the rest, save Mona. Only Mona saw the shadow on his face when he laughingly greeted the picnickers.

"I call it plumb foolishness for one of my age to come up here when I might be comfortable and make a pretense of being cool at home," Prudence grumbled, as she flung herself down on a rug spread for her by the attentively solemn Welch.

The cave was cool and aglow with the lanterns Mona had brought and quickly placed and lighted while Joan held the crowd without the cave, by

pointing out the magnificent view of the serene desert vastness.

"It is cool enough here for any one," Rodney said, making an effort to laugh naturally. "And you should not talk of 'your age' when you are going to beat all us younger chaps to the matrimonial altar. You and the youthful Samuel are of those who have eternal youth," Rodney bantered.

A slow, deep red surged over the face that was strangely like and as strangely unlike the gaunt, grim face of the Prudence White of two years before.

"Now, Rodney, I wouldn't plague her; she is tired." Welch wagged his head, mournfully.

"No, let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we——"

"Live." The silver voice of the old minister finished the quotation to his own satisfaction.

Gray, who had begun it, and over whose head hung the sword of the consumptive, added soberly, "I hope so, Dad."

"Let us eat and drink at any rate." The doctor laughed. "The inner man of me is clamoring for the flesh-pots. Who will begin to feed me? Don't all speak at once, but some one speak quick." His eyes were on Lois now, and a slow flush mantled her face, as she answered involuntarily, "I will."

"Good for you, Lois," Welch shouted. "He is slower than I was." Welch smiled almost brightly now at Prudence. Every one but Lois and the doctor joined in the laugh that followed Welch's sally. Lois bent her head to hide the scarlet flush that dyed her face, and the doctor's face paled, as he looked from her to Joan with a pained light in his eyes.

Every one in the village knew that the doctor loved Lois. All of them wondered why he did not speak.

"While you prepare to feed the doctor and the rest of us, I'll play for you," Rodney said, quickly, eager to shield Lois from further embarrassment.

"You brought the violin, didn't you, Joan?"

"Could you think for a minute that I would forget that, Rodney White? For such a doubt I am half inclined to give the doctor the biggest piece of the pie I baked all by myself." Joan held the violin behind her and faced Rodney, a teasing light in her eyes. "I had intended to give my beloved guardian the largest piece," she teased.

Rodney dropped to his knees in mocking humility. "Forgive me, fair maiden," he pleaded. "Nevermore shall I doubt you."

"Swear it," Joan demanded.

"Good for you, Joan," the irrepressible Gray shouted. "You would have graced the Olympian garden of the Gods. Of such as you are the goddesses made."

Rodney smiled his approval of the youth.

"Swear, or no pie for you at all," Joan demanded, firmly, with a sidewise glance at Gray. Gray beamed at her.

"Hurry up and swear, if you must, Rodney; do anything she asks you. Swearing is ungodly, but you'll do in the end anything Joan tells you to, so you might as well get it over with."

Prudence was tired. She was unused to climbs or long walks, beside she was still ruffled over Rodney's teasing.

"I swear," Rodney said, quickly.

With the violin tucked under his chin, he turned his back to the picnickers and looked out across the desert, as revealed from the cave. The sun rode high in the sky now, and the desert glistened under its hot rays.

From the heart of the violin came deep, quivering notes and majestic chords. On the crest of some of those splendid chords the little group of merry-makers were swept back into some primeval existence—back to the very beginning of things. Piercing flights of melody and deep chords alternated

through the theme that was of the primeval and things primal.

The doctor's eyes never left Lois' face, and his own face was pale and rigid, yet on it was written the light of a new determination. His eyes held hers as the melody swept on and on in matchless harmony, and Lois knew that her days of waiting were over—knew that he would speak soon—knew that he would explain his long silence, a silence of lips only, for his eyes were ever afire with love when they looked into hers.

In the revealing notes of the throbbing melody, one could see the naked soul of things, for the voice of the violin laid bare life as it is.

One could hear in the undercurrent of the theme the rustling of the leaves in some virgin forest—could hear the voices of the first men and their mates laughing in primal joy.

And the song ran on and on until a quiver of pain came in it as the rustling of the leaves of the virgin forest gave place to the ring of progress.

With a final resounding chord, Rodney ceased playing, and turning, caught the light in Joan's eyes, as she leaned forward, her lips half-parted, spellbound by the majesty of the music.

An almost holy look came into the man's eyes as his fingers began to shape the melody of the

"Ave Maria." It was the melody Joan loved best, and under the theme of it ran an undercurrent of his great love for the child. And through it all throbbed the spirit of his self-imposed renunciation—his renunciation of Joan until she would be twenty.

There was silence when the last notes trembled far out across the desert . . . a silence that was more appreciative than any spoken applause.

"Where is my pie?" Rodney demanded at last, boyishly.

Martha Welch dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, and looked at Prudence. "I forgot eating," she said, helplessly.

Rodney laughed. He was very fond of the good Martha.

"We have been fed on the food of the immortal gods," said Gray, and he voiced the feelings of them all.

"I starve, nevertheless," Rodney said, playfully. "I have a longing for something that looks like cold fried chicken. Aunt Prue and Miss Welch fried enough chicks yesterday so that there ought to be some coming our way to-day."

So they ate fried chicken and other dainty accessories, and all went merrily until Joan's pie was served.

Welch took a bite of his piece first and a peculiar expression passed over his face, accentuating its usual mournful appearance. Not a word did he say, however, but munched his pie slowly, solemnly, as if such pie was a thing of delight.

Prudence saw the expression on Welch's face, and hastened to taste her piece of pie, as she glanced around at the entire assemblage eating pie in a peculiarly tense silence.

"Joan Worthington!" Prudence exclaimed. "What did you put in this pie?"

"Nothing but what you told me, Aunt Prudence," cried Joan, her face clouding. "Isn't it good? I sliced the apples and put the spice in and the sugar—and—oh, is it so bad?"

"It is all right, little girl," Rodney responded, as he took a huge bite of the pie and began to chew it, smiling ecstatically, as if the pie was exceedingly delicious.

"Stop eating that pie this instant, Rodney White," Prudence snapped. "It is simply horrid, and besides it may contain poison. Taste it yourself, Joan. Don't stand there gaping while a lot of foolish men eat such pie just because you baked it."

"Oh, oh, it is simply dreadful; I am mortified to death!" Joan wailed, her mouth quivering piti-

fully, as she took a bite of the pie over which she had been so proud that morning. "That spice did not smell right, Aunt Prudence, but I thought the baking would make it all right."

"Where did you get that spice?" Prudence demanded, suddenly suspicious.

"Out of the spice-box on the end of the top shelf in the pantry," Joan returned, spiritedly. "And it said, 'Best mixed spices' on the box, just as plain as could be."

"Joan, you've done it now," Prudence snapped, then her face flushed. "I suppose it is my fault, though—I put that new kind of flea powder in it that Samuel brought over the other day." She turned reproachfully to Welch.

"But for pity's sake, Joan, why couldn't you have got the box of spice on the first shelf?" She turned back to Joan, her eyes flashing. "There is no sense in your keeping your head in the air all the time. You promised me if I'd let you make the pies you'd make them just as I told you, and now you have probably poisoned us all."

"Never mind, Joan, I have a stomach pump," the doctor laughed, but there was a pain in his heart because Prudence was so sharp with the child.

"What's spice for the fleas should be spice for the flee-ers," Gray broke in. "But, Joan, I'll mag-

nanimously give the rest of my pie to the fleas, since Miss White says the spice in your truly excellently baked pies belong to those worthy little workers who make life interesting when alone in one's tent at night with just the stars and thoughts of happy childhood."

Joan began to cry. Rodney drew her down beside him.

"She can weep on my shirt front to-day, can't she, Aunt Prue?" Rodney asked, boyishly.

"She had better be praying for us all to be saved from being poisoned like rats," Prudence snapped.

"You meant like poisoned fleas, Miss White, did you not?" Gray asked, dryly. "If I am to die in the cause of the weeping maiden I want to be sure just what kind of powder was used so effectively."

Every one but Prudence laughed at Gray's sally. Even Joan smiled through a mist of tears. Then suddenly she sprang to her feet and drew her lithe form erect with a quick intake of her breath. "We shall none of us suffer any ill effect from the powder," she exclaimed, a rapt light in her eyes. "'They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them,'" she quoted softly. "We have His promise. The pie

is not good to the taste, but it will not harm any of us."

"Amen!" came the silver voice of the old minister.

"Right-o!" approved Gray.

"Humph!" sniffed Prudence.

"Well, here's to the pie and here's to the flea,
And here's to the powder too.
And here's to the girl who mixed powder and spice,
And here's to her eyes so blue.

"Come, let us drink to her," cried Gray, springing to his feet, a glass of sparkling spring water held high above his head.

"Drink! Drink! Drink the nectar of the gods to the pride of Rainbow Springs."

"Now here's to the Princess Mona!" cried Graham, another of the sick fellows, when the tribute had been given to Joan.

"I'm with you, boys. They are both the finest girls in the world, but I wouldn't mind a bit if the drink was a little stronger." Welch winked at Rodney, and wagged his head mournfully, as he drank the tribute to the chum of Joan.

Joan's eyes scintillated with pleasure, as she pressed Mona's hand in hers.

"Humph!" Prudence sniffed. "Water is strong

enough for any man to drink, Samuel." Prudence's voice showed her disapproval of Welch's reference to something stronger.

Welch scratched his head solemnly. "I swear to you, Prudence, I was thinking of your coffee when I said something stronger."

A hot flush that might have been embarrassment or pride swept over Prudence's face.

Rodney began to play softly to break the tension, and as before luncheon, everything was forgotten while they all listened to the matchless harmony.

Mona was the only one who caught for an instant the glimpse of a laughing, triumphant savage face, as Chawa passed the cave's entrance.

Her eyes were very grave and troubled when they all went down to the village in the purple twilight.

"I want to talk to you to-night," the doctor said, as he paused for an instant with Rodney, beside the tree under which Arth rested. "It is about her." He nodded toward Joan, coming down the road, her arm about Mona's supple waist.

"All right, old man; I've been waiting for it," Rodney returned. The doctor did not notice the last of Rodney's response, his eyes were on Lois.

A pang shot through Rodney as he waited for

Joan and Mona to catch up with him. Rodney shrewdly imagined what the doctor was going to talk about that night, still the pain was lessened as he watched the doctor overtake Lois and raise his hat to her. There had been that in the doctor's face all day which assured Rodney the doctor would also talk to Lois that night.

"Come on in, Joan. Aunt Prue and Welch will be a long time getting here," Rodney said, as he and Joan entered their own yard.

"I've just been imagining what I would do when you grew up and some Prince Charming dashed up on his charger *à la* young Lochinvar out of the west and carried you off from me," Rodney said, whimsically. He teased that he might see the fire-light flash in her eyes, but he was astounded when she flashed back with a trace of her old-time anger in her voice, "Your imagination outruns your common sense, then."

"Well, well, that from my little Joan," he said, lightly, as she stood erect and flashing-eyed before him, and suddenly the girl Joan seemed to have vanished from his life, leaving a woman Joan, unutterably sweet.

He jerked himself together with an effort, as he recalled his determination to wait five long years before he told Joan all that was in his heart to tell

her now, strange, divinely sweet mixture of child and woman that she was.

"What a kid it is!" he said, with a laugh, when he could control his voice.

The frank, teasing tone seemed to disappoint the somber blue eyes searching his face.

"Come on in, then," she returned, with just a trace of impatience in her low voice. "I'll give you your supper before Aunt Prudence gets here."

"Not if I know myself, you won't," came the voice of Prudence.

"Oh, please let me get the supper to-night, Aunt Prudence; I'll be careful," Joan pleaded.

"No, I'll get it," Prudence returned, ungraciously. "I left you to get supper last night, and you put sugar in the oyster soup instead of salt, and salt in Rodney's coffee when he distinctly asked for sugar, and . . ."

"Don't name anything else to-night, please, Aunt Prudence," pleaded a very meek Joan. "But no one was sick because of the pie," she cried, triumphantly, as she disappeared in the house, Rodney close beside her.

"Stay out here a while, Prudence," Welch begged timidly. "Don't you love the way the wind blows in all full of sweetness when the shadows of night begin to creep softly over the desert?"

"You are daffy over this desert country just as Rodney and Joan are," Prudence retorted, as she brushed aside Welch's timidly detaining hand and went in to get supper.

Prudence was frankly past the age of romancing in the moonlight. She tried to make Welch realize it, yet liked him all the better because he would not be a prosaic middle-aged lover, as she told him he should be.

In spite of his funereal appearance, Welch had the spring of eternal youth in his heart, and was as boyish in this second romance as he had been in his first homage to the goddess of love.

"Humph, moonlight and shadows of night creeping softly over the desert," Prudence sniffed, her mouth twitching, as she mixed her bread, her supple wrists moving in rhythmic flexibility.

"Samuel acts like a boy, or would if I'd let him. I hope I never shall act as silly as he does, but Samuel is a good man, and I'll be proud of him in Orion. He looks so dignified and scholarly. Samuel is *such* a handsome man," she sighed, happily.

Not for worlds would Prudence have called Welch "Sam." Even when alone she thought of him as "Samuel."

"Tell Samuel he can stay to supper if he wants to," she jerked out, as Joan came in to set the table

for supper. "I think Mona will be here presently; I told her to come in half an hour . . . now don't get me all messed up," she grumbled, secretly pleased, however, when Joan flung her arms about her neck and kissed her.

"Oh, you are good, good!" Joan whispered, implanting a kiss upon the ear into which she had just whispered, then she flew from the room to bid Welch stay for supper.

"I knew she'd ask me to stay if I hung round long enough," Welch returned, with a solemn wink at the moon, rising silver-winged in the sky.

The supper was a delight. Such biscuits as only Prudence could make were flanked by potatoes as well cooked as the bread, rich and tender ham, fried just as Joan liked it best, with clear amber coffee that had an aromatic fragrance, found only in the coffee brewed by Prudence.

"Promise Mona you will not leave the house to-night," Mona pleaded, as Joan bade her good-night after supper.

"Why?" Joan demanded.

"Because I, Mona, wish it," Mona returned, softly. "Would you not grant me such a small wish, little friend?"

"I would do almost anything for you, Mona, dear," Joan returned, with a fervent kiss. "But I

had thought of going up to the twin palms to-night to meditate on having reached the ripe old age of fifteen, but I love you well enough to wait another year for that meditation, and then I'll have another year to think about," Joan added, with a happy little laugh.

"I am glad you love Mona so," Mona said, gratefully, and glided off down the road toward home with the graceful, swinging glide that was her own peculiar seductive gift.

An hour later Joan started up the trail that led to the Cave of Rest. She had thought of going for Mona to accompany her, but the cottage windows were dark, and she supposed Mona was asleep. It was long past her bedtime.

"I am glad I did not promise outright not to go away from the house to-night, but I implied it," she added, honestly, as she looked back ruefully. "Nothing but that would make me go after even an implied promise, but I cannot leave Her up there to-night. I simply cannot. It must have slipped off when Mona and I were spreading the rugs down." She put her hand regretfully to her throat where, ever since she could remember, had rested the locket containing her mother's miniature. She had looked at it the first thing every morning of her life since she was old enough to know what it meant . . .

and now it was gone. She had missed it when she started to look into the sweet eyes so like her own, before preparing for bed.

It would have been impossible for one of her temperament to wait until morning to search for the precious locket.

She slipped out through the side door without disturbing either Rodney and the doctor, who were talking in low tones in the living-room, or Welch and Prudence in the dining-room.

As she passed the Indian burying ground, she wondered, a bit regretfully, where Don could be, then she smiled as she thought of him with the old man she loved so dearly and who she had insisted should be joint owner, with her, of the beautiful collie. She smiled again dreamily, happily, as she recalled many of the events that had taken place during the eventful three years that had passed since she and Rodney and Mona had found the old man in the old well at Tellput.

But for the first time in her life—and she had gone there alone at midnight—she shivered as she entered the Cave of Rest and lighted one of the lanterns that had added to the brightness of the cave that day.

She found the locket near the spot where Rodney had stood when he played that day, and her eyes

glowed with a light that would have gladdened Rodney. The light still lingered in her eyes as she started down the trail and, with the locket once more resting where it had rested so long, she was inclined to laugh at her fears until just as she reached the twin palms Chawa, with a triumphant light in his flashing, savage eyes, suddenly appeared before her.

CHAPTER XVI

“**W**ONDER where Gray is?” Bentley questioned at large of the group of men around one of the reading-tables in the Hall of Hope.

“Don’t know; he started down the trail with the divine Martha,” said Hobson, one of the half-dozen boys whom the doctor had deemed able to make the climb to the Cave of Rest.

“If I’d had my way, I would have come down with that royal princess, Mona,” piped up Graham, a young Englishman. “But she’d have none of me,” he added, with a comically mournful air. “She and White’s ward came down together, with White and Dad close behind them.”

Graham had only been a few weeks at the village, but ever since his arrival he had been half in love with Mona.

“Oh, fudge, your royal princess is just a half-breed,” Hobson said, sneeringly.

“Don’t care, she’s the real article,” Graham returned, heatedly.

"Mona is all that is good and pure and true," came the voice of the old minister. "And furthermore, gentlemen, I stand to her as Rodney White does to Joan. It may also interest you to know she has finally consented to be adopted by me. I have applied for the necessary papers . . . soon she will be my daughter, by adoption. This Fall I expect to send her off to a finishing school. I want both her and Joan to attend Mills."

The old minister moved directly in front of the boys and faced Hobson.

"Mona is God's child, Hobson, my boy, and a lady," he said, gently.

Hobson fell back from the searching gaze of the old man.

"I assure you, I meant to treat her as a lady," piped Graham. "By Jove, I did, you know. And hang me, Mr. Sherwood, I shall ask you for her hand some day. She'd grace a crown, by Jove. Not that I'll ever have a crown to offer her, you know, but she's a princess, sir, a princess. And I love her, by Jove, I do. My love is real and sincere, sir." Graham's face flushed, and his voice shook.

"Good for you, Graham; I did not know you had it in you. You are of the stuff of which men are made," sang out one of the men in the background.

Hobson started toward the door, muttering under his breath.

"Come back, Hobson, boy," the old man said, kindly.

Hobson obeyed sulkily.

Dad's eyes met Hobson's somber ones with a tender, compassionate look; suddenly the old man smiled.

Hobson never forgot that smile. It seemed to him then and in the future that the smile was the benediction of some Holy Spirit.

All anger and defiance left Hobson's eyes. "Forgive me, Dad," he cried, his voice ringing true.

"Aye, lad, that I had done before you spoke. I called you back because I love all my boys; I cannot let any of them go from me wounded. It is the gift of the young to speak lightly. I would trust my Mona with you any place, lad."

Just then Martha came to the door. "Where is Mr. Gray?" she asked, with a trace of anxiety in her voice.

Martha was the matron of the doctor's ideal resort, and at last Martha had found her true vocation in life. The maternal spirit in her ever looked out of her mild eyes, and she mothered her "boys," as she called the sick men, with a truly beautiful, motherly tenderness. Moreover, she over-

saw the cooking, and every meal was a triumph of nourishing delectability.

"I think he turned in at the Major's," said Merrimac, a silent, diffident chap, who seldom spoke unless necessary. Merrimac was a university graduate, had taken a year's course at Cooper's Medical College. He was of valuable assistance to the doctor, and the doctor was helping him in a course of study that would be of greater value to him than the training at the Medical College would have been during his second and third years there.

"Reckon Gray has gone to plague Cuby," Graham advanced. "By Jove, you know, that nigger is a heap of fun, he's real sport, by Jove. Flannigan went with him," he added.

Merrimac turned a page of the book he was reading, and lost the trend of the conversation.

"He is all right, Martha," Dad said, cheerfully, but his pale face became a more silver gray, and a pained look crept into his eyes.

"There he is now," exclaimed Hobson. A door at the side of the hall swung open, and Gray entered with a cheerful, "Hello, stay-at-homes, I've been making a call on Cuby."

"Faith, and he wint to call on Cuby, so he did," broke in Flannigan, brushing back his red Irish hair with a freckled hand. "Begorry, and I wint

with him, and whin we got there Cuby was alone."

"Saw the Major shying off with that young Apollo, Chawa, or we should not have paid our respects to Cuby," laughed Gray, perching himself on the edge of the table near the old minister.

The old man smiled at the lad, and laid his gentle hand on the thin shoulders. Gray was the life of the village despite the fact that none knew better that himself how short a time he might be there. He had made the climb to the Cave of Rest that day against the strict orders of the doctor not to do so. When reproached by the doctor for disobeying orders, Gray made answer in his usual flippant manner. "How could Joan be fifteen and have her picnic party, doctor, dear, without me there to oversee the job? I'll not go next year, eh, doctor?"

And the doctor had turned away misty-eyed. The doctor was very fond of Gray—every one was. He was so cheerful, so patient, and withal so unselfish and ever ready to do something for the other sick men, almost all of whom were much more able to do for him than he for them.

"What now between you and Cuby?" asked the old minister.

"Faith and there was plinty," said Flannigan.

"It's meself that calls no more with Mister Gray. We had to lave so sudden like. I was half-way down the home road when Gray overtook me. 'The divil,' says I, 'but I hate to run from a dommed nigger,' begging your pardon, Dad, but that's what Cuby is. Gray coughed."

"Never mind the cough, Flannigan, that is a minor detail," interrupted Gray.

"Well, as I was saying," Flannigan mopped his flushed face. "As I was saying, Gray coughed, and . . ."

"I acknowledge the cough, red head, but don't linger on it until the judgment day," snapped Gray, whimsically.

"Well, he coughed," said Flannigan, beginning again.

Gray shrugged his shoulders with a comical air.

"Then he panted, and says he, 'It's not the first time we've moved for Cuba,' and I call that a dommed good joke, even if Gray did run alongside of me like the divil was after us entirely," Flannigan chuckled.

Gray smiled at him in a quizzical way. "Who is going to tell the first of the story, Flannigan?"

"Faith and you have the floor, and it's long-winded you are when it comes to yarning, so go on, while I rest me weary soul a bit."

Flannigan flung himself down on one of the leather cots with which the hall abounded, and propped himself up on his elbows.

"Hadn't you better lie down and rest, lad?" The old minister looked searchingly into the eyes so unnaturally bright. He sighed as his gaze swept on down the pale cheeks with the spots of vivid red burning in them.

"I am living now, Dad, let me be gay; I'll have to lie down soon enough," Gray pleaded, boyishly.

"Tell the story now, lad, then off to bed," the old man returned, softly, watching the boy lovingly, as he told the story.

"I turned up my collar and pulled down my hat before I knocked on the door—Flannigan hid behind the orange tree there at the side door to watch the fun.

"'Is the Major at home, good sir?' I asked, suavely, when Cuby opened the door.

"'No,' he jerked out, and started to close the door. I stuck my foot over the threshold . . . Good big foot, mine, and rather persuasive-looking if I do say it myself. . . ."

Gray eyed his feet reflectively, then went on with a low chuckle.

"Cuby stood there scowling. 'I might do business with you, my friend,' I began. 'I represent the

great American Insurance Company. You pay our company the small sum of fifty cents weekly. We, in turn, pay you five dollars a month as long as you live. We also pledge ourselves to give you the finest funeral imaginable when you shuffle off.'

" 'What am dat last?' Cuby asked. His face was full of interest now. He opened wide the door and stood back to let me enter. I didn't accept his implied invitation. It is sometimes easier to get into a house than it is to get out of it. I began to explain to Cuby, as if I did not see that the door was open. I said, 'When you cash in—when you die, to put it plainly, we will give you the most elegant funeral you ever saw in all your life. Our society is especially beneficial to all of your color. In fact, the great American Insurance Company caters especially to your unjustly down-trodden race.' "

"Said that just like a preacher, be gob, but he did," shouted Flannigan.

"Shut up," Gray said, succinctly. "I am telling this tale. The door began to come to, inch by inch, began to pinch my number tens, in fact," he chuckled. "I knew I had tacked wrong some way. While I was getting my bearings again, Cuby broke forth into language, and he's a beaut, Cuby is, when he gets going.

“ ‘Sassieties—Organizations—Protective Insurance Companies. Yes, indeed, they cater to my down-trodden race. Huh!’ grunted Cuby. His eyes glittered and he seemed about to warm up to the subject.

“ ‘My dear sir,’ I said, sweetly. ‘The great American Insurance Company is like unto no other in this great wide world, I assure you.’ ”

“And Cuby looked so wild, I thought he was going to bat him one right then,” Flannigan broke in, eagerly.

“Keep still, son, I have the floor. I looked Cuby straight in the eye and said mournfully, ‘Sir, you have to die some day. We all have to die. It is the privilege of the human race. It’s the one sure thing. You have to die, my dear man.’

“ ‘Reckon I knows I’s e got to die,’ Cuby retorted. ‘Dey’s dying ebber once in de while in dis burg. I’m mighty damn glad the boss is going to clear out ob here soon.’ ”

“What is that?” Dad interrupted, eagerly.

“Surest thing you know, that’s what he said; I heard him,” Flannigan cried, excitedly.

“Go to sleep, son, you need it,” Gray admonished, then turned to the old minister. “Cuby implied that he and the exquisite Major were going to vanish soon, sir.”

He hesitated an instant.

"Go on with your story, lad," the old minister returned, but his eyes were troubled.

" 'Well, my dear sir,' I continued, 'I am glad you realize we all have to die, but while we live let us all take advantage of having an income of five dollars every month by the small payment of fifty cents a week. Think what a good thing we offer you, my dear sir.'

" 'Things that look too good am generally to be suspicionated ob,' Cuby interrupted me.

" 'Not the great American Insurance Com——' I began.

" 'I know de rest ob it,' Cuby interrupted again. He was very dignified too, was Cuby. 'I'se been hoodwinked by seberal new-fangled sassieties dat wa'n't wuth a postage stamp after it had gone through the mails. I jined the Fraternal Unity once when dey was habin' a ruction an' a hullabaloo in our town, and dey got more money out ob me in a week den I'd intended dey should in a whole life time,' quoth Cuby. 'Dey promised me to allers treat me as a brother no matter how down I got in de world. I believed dem 'til one day I fin' I hab no money. I went up to de Fraternal Unity house to a little social time dey was a habin' a few nights later. De gal at de desk in de anteroom says:

"You'se not a member any more case you habn't paid your dues for two months—you'se done crossed off our book . . ." I don't jine no more companies,' says Cuby, very haughty like.

"'But we are not that kind of a company, dear sir,' I said, sweetly, and then that fool Flannigan had to laugh and spoil everything. I would have had Cuby going good and plenty pretty soon. Gee! Cuby's face was something fierce to look upon when he found a joke was being played on him. He grabbed his gun and . . ."

"And we run—run like the divil," burst out Flannigan.

"That is the truth, we did run," Gray laughed, joining in the uproar of laughter that followed—laughter in which even the quiet Merrimac joined.

"Did he recognize you?" Dad asked, anxiously.

"He didn't have time," Flannigan shouted. "When Gray saw the jig was up, he did a fancy getaway that would do credit to a bank burglar."

The old man smiled his relief.

"It is time for bed, lads," he said, gently. "But before you go, I will tell you all the joke on Joan to-day. She asked me to tell it; since some of the boys knew it, she did not think it fair to keep it

from the rest of you, and the chaps who knew it, being gentlemen, would not mention it."

"Thank you, Dad," Gray said, softly.

"We are to stay here until the doctor comes to-night," Hobson advanced, quietly. "He requested it just after he came down from the picnic this evening. Said he would be here about ten o'clock."

"Ah," murmured the old man. "So he is going to speak at last," he mused.

"By Jove, but I felt creepy and little when Joan stood up there like some ancient goddess or saint and quoted Scripture at us," said Graham, when the old minister had finished telling of the flea-powder pies. "I was beginning to feel all sick and crampy, too," he added, with a wry smile, "but when she stood there, looking so exalted, and said, in that cock-sure manner of hers, that none of us would feel any bad effects from the pie, by Jove, the sick feeling left, and I haven't felt it since."

"Same here," said Gray. "Joan is a wonder. She told me the Christian Science statement of being the other day. I asked her if she was a Christian Scientist. 'I hope I am a Christian,' she flashed back. 'I am not a Christian Scientist, but I do believe in the efficacy of prayer. I know there are many wonderful faith cures now, even as there were when Christ was upon the earth. I just re-

cited to you the Christian Science statement of being. They deny that sickness exists. Christ healed the sick, but he did not deny that there was sickness and sin in the world.

“ ‘There are other sects in the world who heal by faith, and effect as many wonderful cures as do the Christian Scientists, and these other sects do not deny that sickness and sin exist. There is good in all of them, Mr. Gray. And the main thing after all is to believe in Christ, and we all want to go to Him some day, so it does not really matter how young we are when we go, does it? Dad says, “when one gathers a choice bouquet of flowers he mixes the buds with the full-blown blossoms, and so it is when God gathers His bouquets from *His* flower garden.” I am so glad you are ready to be gathered whenever the Lord is ready,’ she said, seriously. ‘And I am exceedingly glad I did not remain long enough with Miss Warren to become a full-fledged Christian Scientist as she wished me to. I felt exceedingly bad for a time because she did not adopt me as she had intended, but the Lord had better things in store for me, and Rodney says, “All life is so, ‘everything works together for the good of those who love the Lord.’” I am sure everything worked together for my good, even if I did not fully appreciate the method of working at the time.’ ”

"She said all this as solemn as solemn could be, mind you, looking straight at me with that rapt light in her eyes that makes one think they are talking to their mother, especially if one's mother happens to be dead, as mine is.

"Mona came along about that time, and hang my grandmother's pet cat if that Joan girl wasn't flying off across the desert on Pegasus almost before I could say scat! Mona was on her pony, and Joan was laughing like she does when she is perfectly happy, just as if a serious thought had never crossed her mind."

Dad smiled. The tale was so highly characteristic of Joan.

"Wonder where she gets such a mixture of ideas?" said Hobson, who had been silent until now.

"She has been with Rodney a little over three years," the old man answered, with a little reminiscent smile. "You should have seen her when I first knew her. That worthy aunt of Rodney's has ding-donged at her until she is not half so impulsive and free to talk as she was. When she came to Rodney—you have all heard the tale of how she came to him—she owned, to quote her, 'exactly one Bible, one book of fairy tales,' and had spent six months with a Christian Science practitioner."

"That explains it," laughed Gray. "I believe she can quote most of the Christian Science text-book, and I am confident she knows almost all of the Bible by heart."

"Not quite," Dad returned, with a smile, "but the child knows more of the Bible than most of us do, and she knows how to apply it, too."

So they discussed Joan and praised her, for they all idolized the child, while Joan faced her danger alone, and the doctor and Rodney talked together in Rodney's living-room.

"I hardly know how to begin," the doctor said, sadly.

"Rodney, I am going to tell you all—my real name—everything—and please God from this day on I go by my own name. Thank God, my life—my past—my present—my future shall be as an open book for all men to read. Even though I lose your friendship, and I value it above that of any other man's—I shall speak. You caused me to speak to-night, lad, you and your magic music. Man! Man! what a gift you have. You make the violin talk. God! It flays a man's soul until it is raw, then heals it with one magic note. You'll speak to the world some day. Some day you and your violin will be famous, but to my confession, man, for confession it is."

Rodney raised his hand, interrupting the doctor as he was about to continue. "Let me say right here, doctor, that nothing, nothing—do you understand?—can lessen my friendship for you. I prayed you would speak when I was playing up there to-day and yet I dreaded to have you speak. As for the violin and fame. I had my dream of fame—my dream of the world at my feet, sobbing or laughing at my will—I had the power—have it now. I sacrificed health itself to my great ambition. I would almost have given my soul for fame—fame such as I knew might be mine—given a few years of perfect health. I came to the cross roads where I must take one way or the other one winter day. I had to choose between a brief triumphant tour—and life. I fought the battle out on Christmas Eve—you know the story of how Joan came to me out of the storm. I had not won the battle when she crept in the room in answer to the call of my violin. I think I must have felt her presence before the battle was won between fame and life. I think her presence there turned the tide in favor of life. I know a divine peace came suddenly. I played on—played—the 'Ave Maria,' I remember, and then, I looked around and saw her. I have played only a few times since we have been here. Until to-day the old pain, excruciatingly intense, followed each hour with

my violin. To-day I have not felt the usual aftermath of pain."

He arose and began to pace the floor with long, swinging strides. "But I find the old ambition is gone. I mean the desire to bring the world to my feet has left me. I am still ambitious, but Joan, bless her, and your wonderful work here have together opened the true life-book for me to read—I have read—read and understood. I intended to come to you to-morrow to offer to play an hour or so each day for the boys at the hall. Their joy in it will be sweeter to me than would have been the applause of the entire world three years ago. I'll never forget the light in Gray's eyes when I looked at him to-day when I was playing the 'Ave Maria.' Brave old Gray, is there no hope for him?"

"No, he cannot recover—he came too late," the doctor answered. "He will go some day with a jest on his lips, but Gray is square with his Maker even if a jest at fate is the last word that falls from his lips . . . and I expect he *will* die jesting," he added, not knowing how truly he spoke.

"Will the violin help over there as I hope it will?" Rodney broke the silence that followed, and his voice was shaky. Every one loved Gray.

"Help!" the doctor exclaimed, fervently. "I sometimes think diversion as much as medicine is

what the men need. And music—such music as yours, man—will be of untold pleasure and benefit. The lads all love music—they need diversion—I would not know what to do with them at times were it not for Joan and—and—Lois.” His fine face flushed as he reverently spoke the name “Lois.” Suddenly he recalled why he was there—remembered, too, that he had asked Lois to wait for him to come to her at ten o’clock, and it must be after nine now. The boys were going to wait for him, too.

Rodney saw the look on his friend’s face, and understood it.

“You came to talk, old man,” Rodney said, understandingly. “Go ahead, and remember that nothing you say can break our friendship or shake my faith in you.”

“And yet, you condemned me once most bitterly,” the doctor returned, gravely. “You are young yet, Rodney boy. You may judge me harshly, as you once did unconsciously. Do not promise your continuance of friendship until I have finished—for there is a woman in the story.”

“I have guessed lots, old man, but here is my hand in friendship just the same,” Rodney interrupted.

The doctor took the outstretched hand—and held it.

"I wear the brand of philanthropy on my forehead," he began, gravely, "but on my heart there is a scar caused by a moment's weakness, and the scar scourges me every hour I live, with a burning, torturing intensity.

"I must tell you the story of the scar, Rodney. Then I shall tell it to Lois—and the boys. To you I shall tell all—Lois, too, shall know all. But to you I must talk first. You shall be my spiritual sanctuary—you shall judge me. I believe you will judge as would the Saviour . . . as He does judge me. Shall I begin, Rodney?"

"Yes," Rodney breathed, softly.

The doctor sighed, passed his hand across his eyes as one does to shut out an intense light, then he began.

"You spoke of ambition a while ago. I always, until the scar came, had a great ambition of my own, but back of my ambition was my father with an intense ambition for his only son such as he had not had even for himself, and my father was an ambitious man. When I tell you his name, you will recognize him as one of the greatest medical lights of the century.

"I was only nineteen when the woman, or rather girl, entered my life—only nineteen and the sixth in direct line of descent of great medical men. I

had never in all those nineteen years had the influence of good women—or bad ones either for that matter. My life had been strangely lacking the gift of a woman's divine presence. My mother gave her life for mine, and . . .”

“Mine also,” Rodney interrupted, softly.

The doctor smiled and pressed his friend's hand understandingly.

“My early days were spent in the usual manner of the sons of rich men . . . with this exception, I was always taken care of by men, never by women. My nurse was a man—my tutors were men. I passed my school days in a boys' preparatory school, but I read books as some of the other boys did not. And the books dealt with women—women invariably divine and fair to look upon. When I entered medical college, I idolized women to such extent that I never discerned that even the fairer sex could have feet of clay. I should have doubted an angel straight from heaven as quickly as I would have doubted the worst woman on earth.

“I remember once I knocked one of the fellows down because he sneered at the negro washerwoman who did up our shirts for us. I offered my incense at the shrine of that old colored woman because she was a woman. I showered her with flowers and dress lengths and bonbons even as I would have

pressed those things upon all the women I knew had I not been as timid with them as I was full of worship for them. You should have heard that old negro woman's, 'God bress you, honey chile.' I am glad I made her happy. She was a dear old black mammy. Our home was in Virginia. I went home for Christmas vacation as usual that year. One snow-smothered day, I went down to the village. I was just opposite an almost snow-buried cottage, when I saw her—the first woman—a slim, shivering girl in a faded black dress. Her face was pinched and blue with cold; her eyes, blue and wistful, as they met mine seemed to hold an unknown world of sorrow in their somber depths.

"Her slender, cold hands could not work the key in the door of the half-buried cottage. She began to sob—dry, harsh sobs unlike a woman; she sobbed but shed no tears.

"I had stood spellbound until now. At the sight of her grief, there surged over me and through me an overwhelming, overmastering desire to take her in my arms and comfort her.

"I cannot explain my feelings. I felt thrilled with the same joy that Adam must have felt when he first saw Eve and knew that she belonged to him. I knew the girl was mine—had been mine through countless ages. Even now, I cannot think

of that moment without the same feeling of having awaited that *moment* since the beginning of time itself.

“I held her eyes with mine, and some of the sorrow seemed to leave them; the pitiful little mouth almost smiled.

“To make a long story short, it was I who turned the key in the door. We entered the poorly but neatly furnished cottage together. When she had lighted the lamp, for it was dusk now, I asked where to find fuel to build a fire.

“‘There is none,’ she answered, in a lifeless voice.

“I went into another room—the kitchen—when I came back to her I had wood to build the fire. That the fuel I held in my arms had once been a kitchen chair, she knew, but she smiled at me, a wan, pitiful little smile, as I knelt on the cold hearth and coaxed the fire to burn. I was very proud of that—the first fire I ever made. I dragged an easy-chair up before the jovial blaze, and gently led her to it. Ah! the grateful warmth of that fire out of the old chair.” He sighed reminiscently. “‘Is there any tea in the house?’ I asked, as she held out her chilled hands to the crackling blaze. She shook her head.

“‘I’ll be back soon,’ I flung over my shoulder, as I left her. I ran all the way down to the business

section of the little village, now gripped in an Arctic blast. The streets were almost deserted. I saw no one who knew me. The stores I entered were empty, save for some clerk with half-frozen hands.

“When I returned to the cottage, with my arms full, the fire had died down and the girl was crying—crying as women cry.

“I had forgotten to purchase fuel, but that did not bother me. I rekindled the fire with another kitchen chair, while the girl dried her eyes and sobbed out the cause of her grief. Her mother had died the day before—had been buried that day—the girl was alone and penniless. She and her mother had lived only a short time in the village. Until a few months before she had been counted one of the wealthiest girls in Mississippi; a few months before I found her her father had lost his fortune and her mother’s also in a sudden slump in the cotton market. A bullet did the rest as far as he was concerned. The girl, who had been considered a great heiress one day, was a pauper the next.

“The mother owned this little cottage, and she and the girl came to it as soon as everything was over. They had only a few dollars; these soon went for medicine and food.

“The mother broke down under the strain of it

all. Everything of value in the little cottage was sold the first weeks of the mother's illness. Later the house was mortgaged to the squire of the village—a heartless, grasping wretch, who had told the girl before the last clod had covered her mother from her sight, that he would be 'round to take possession of his house the following morning.'

"I comforted her while she ate the food I brought her. I had bought wine also, and it soon gave a faint glow of color to the pinched, white face.

"I obeyed a sudden uncontrollable impulse and took her in my arms, where she remained as content and trustful as a little child, while I planned for her future—our future—for it had come to that—life without her was not to be considered.

"Love had come to us both at the same instant. We burned most of the furniture that night, and the fire I fed so lavishly, roared and crackled its approval of our youthful, innocent plans. I knew my father would think I was spending the night with a boy chum of mine. I often did that without previous mention of my intentions to him.

"The following day we were married in an adjoining county. . . . We were secretly married—I knew my father, and even though it hurt me to ask my darling's consent to secrecy when I longed to blazon my love and pride of her to all the world—

I asked that our marriage be secret, and she agreed, that is why I wear the scar on my heart. I feared my father's wrath—feared to be cut off from the liberal allowance which would allow my girl-wife and I to live in some degree of luxury.

“When I returned to college, she accompanied me. We lived in a well-furnished apartment near the college dormitory, where I still kept the rooms I had had ever since I entered the college. We were blissfully happy, Rodney. Such happiness could not last forever. My beautiful girl-wife grew more lovely every day. Each day I grew more eager for the time when I should have finished college and could support her and acknowledge her to the world.

“Then the unexpected happened—a child came to us. We were happy in this added blessing, though, divinely happy. We knew that it increased our danger of discovery, and I feared *that* discovery more than ever now. I knew my father would discontinue my allowance—that was the worst I accredited him of being capable of doing in those days—I could not bear the thought of my girl-wife or my innocent baby-girl perhaps suffering for the very necessities of life while I struggled to keep them clothed and fed. I am not advancing my standpoint to win your sympathy or a lenient judgment. No man could judge me more harshly than

I judge myself, but I was still very young, Rodney, just a little over twenty.

“The inevitable happened. My father, in some manner, obtained an inkling of the affair—run his clew to earth, and walked in on us, unheralded and unannounced, one evening just after we had finished our dinner and were having our usual evening romp with the baby, then six months old and the image of her mother.

“There was a scene—I do not like to recall it—I stood by my wife, I shall always rejoice that nothing my father said or threatened moved me in my intentions to be true to her and fight for her no matter what happened or what the future brought us.

“I can see her now, with our baby in her arms, held close, in mother fashion, while she looked first at my father, then at me, and each time her eyes met mine they were full of love and faith and pride of me—like the look of an angel was that level glance of hers.

“Finally, my father suggested a walk around the square while we continued our talk. ‘We will see what the fresh air does for both of us, madam,’ he said, bowing low to my wife. My father, even when most angry, was ever courteous to women.

“I kissed my wife and baby, and went with him

out into the night—a beautiful night with a white, caressing moon.

“ ‘ We’ll just walk over to my hotel,’ father said, after we had taken a heated turn or two around the square.

“ I went with him, God help me. He proposed a drink, and although I seldom drank, I could not refuse my father. And fool that I was, I thought the liquor would give me strength to battle on against that indomitable will of his, against which I had never been hurled before. I drank. The next I knew, it was broad daylight, and my head felt like lead.

“ I was dazed for a long time. When I could see clearly, I realized that my father had drugged me in order to carry out some preconceived plan of his to separate me from my wife and baby. I rushed from the hotel like a madman. Hatless and coatless, I ran every step of the way to the little apartment where we had been so happy together—my girl-wife and I and the little girl-baby.

“ God help me, Rodney, my wife and baby were not there. They were gone—gone! It almost drives me mad even now to think of that moment when I realized they were not there. I raved for hours. I ransacked the little apartment inch by inch, but there was no clew—no note—nothing left

to give me an inkling of what had happened while I lay senseless at the hotel. My wife and child had vanished as completely as if they had never existed.

“At last, I went back to the hotel. I wanted to murder my father, I thought to find him there, but he was gone. The clerk gave me a curt little note from him. The note was to the effect that he had straightened things out for me this time, but did not want to have to repeat the performance. That drove me wilder than ever. The implied insult was almost more than I could bear and retain my reason.

“I wished I had never been born. I grabbed my coat and hat, and put them on as I went out of the hotel. When I again reached the dismantled flat, the janitor met me at the door and said an expressman had just taken away the furnishings of my apartment.

“I raved at him; cursed him to the uttermost parts of the earth for allowing such a thing. Through it all he smoked a dirty clay pipe and leered at me out of his squinting eyes. ‘I’m in the pay of the ould gint,’ he said at last, as he spat almost on my feet.

“God! I could have murdered the huge brute. When I see a man of his type, it always brings back that day when he stood there barring my way to the little flat, by brute strength alone.

“Defeated by him, I went over to my college quarters and wrote a letter to my father—I dared not go home—I should have killed my father had I seen him then. I did not want to do that, for my mother’s sake and for the sake of my girl-wife and baby, wherever they were.

“Very childish was that letter to my father, but full of an undying love for my wife and child.

“My father’s answer was characteristic of the man; he said: ‘Another outbreak of puppy love over the affair I have just canceled will result in the marriage being annulled. Remember, you are not of age. Be sensible and go on with your studies, or force me to act harshly with you as you choose—the result as far as your so-called wife and her child is concerned is the same—you never shall see the woman or the child again.’

“I wrote another letter of appeal, a letter that would have softened a man less stern and unyielding than was my father. ‘My child shall not be dishonored by an annulment of our marriage,’ I added at the close.

“‘Dishonor, you young fool,’ was the reply. ‘You do not even know the meaning of the word. Go to work and forget you have been a donkey. Your ears are extra long, but you will succeed if you try.’

"So he tried to break me with his wrath and ridicule every time I appealed to him. I put detectives to work, but they were previously paid to follow no clew for me. I searched for some clew myself but failed absolutely.

"Nearly two years after that terrible night, when my father spirited my wife away, he came to me and told me very kindly my wife was dead. He said my child was with an old Scotchwoman who would give her life for it if need be.

"I raved at my father then as I had not raved even when he took my wife and baby from me. I was mad to see our baby, the replica of my darling. My father let me rave, impotently rage until I wore myself out. He would not even tell me where my wife was buried.

"I moved all the machinery in my power to locate the child. I failed. I plunged into my work and studied as I had never studied before. I hoped against hope that some day my father would relent—would tell me where my child was, if I could only fully satisfy his great ambition for me in the work he laid out for me. I had no will of my own those days.

"And then my father fell ill—dangerously, critically ill. He had ever been kind to me except in this. I forgave him before he died—forgave him

everything, even though he told me in the last hour he lived that he did not even know where my child was—had not known since the year after my wife's death when a check he had mailed to the old Scotchwoman was returned, the letter unopened.

“My father regretted then what he had done. He saw in that last hour that he had not been in the right, yet he was proud of my achievements in the medical world, and even at the end believed my success was greater than it would have been had he not dealt with me as he had.

“My father left me great wealth, but it meant nothing to me, my last hope of ever seeing my child was gone. I had no doubt but that the child was dead. I could not bear to practice my profession. I was fêted and flattered as every son of rich and famous men is flattered, especially if that son has just come into the wealth of the father. I was sick of everything in the world when I came out here.

“I turned my back on my Creator during the first years I was out here, Rodney. Seven Pine Lodge heard my profanity and sacrilege every waking hour, until I returned to it after that first visit to Arth.

“I found peace and a new love—a love strong

and sincere—at almost the same hour. The child led me back to God, Rodney. Lois taught me love, a love that will last as long as I do. I did not know the child was mine—my own little girl-child, when she led me back to my Creator, although her eyes haunted me with their resemblance to other eyes. I loved the child from the first with a love so paternal that it astounded me until I knew she was of my own flesh and blood. The night of her twelfth birthday party—the night I set Dad's broken leg—I learned she was my child. My real name is Norman Worthington, Rodney, and now, my boy, what about the friendship?"

Rodney caught his breath sharply, and his voice broke when he tried to speak.

"I am your friend just as I said I would be," he said, huskily. "I ask your pardon, too, for the hatred I have had all these years for Joan's father. But you will not take Joan from me, will you, old man? I want her. I love her with a love that is as great as yours ever was for her mother. When she is old enough to know the meaning of such love, if she loves me the way I pray she will, I want her for my wife . . . want her as you wanted that other Joan—as you want Lois." Rodney's voice broke again.

Norman Worthington reached out his arms and

drew Rodney to him. "God bless you for all you have been to her," he said, hoarsely, and Rodney felt hot tears—a strong man's tears—splashing on him.

"She is your child, Rodney—some day, God grant she may be your wife, but, Rodney, I must tell her I am her father, even if I lose Lois by the telling," the doctor said, after a long silence, during which soul had met soul and communed.

"She shall know you are her father, my friend, as soon as you care to tell her, and I expect that will be early in the morning. She will be very happy, for she loves you now. She has always censured her father for leaving her mother, but she will forgive you when you tell her how it happened. Joan is of a divinely forgiving nature, and if I have read Lois Reeves aright, she will be as true. She will love you none the less because of your first love."

The doctor's face became suddenly illumined—all the shadows seemed to have been lifted from it by Rodney's last words.

"God grant you are right, Rodney," he said, searching Rodney's face, a tender light in his keen eyes.

"Dad is going to send Mona to Mills this September; I should like to have Joan go with her, if you

are willing—she is gifted beyond her years—I should like for her to have music, she loves it so, and besides, she should be given a chance to mingle with other girls and boys of her own age.”

This was something for Rodney to think about after the doctor had left him—and the soul of the man was rent within him. “How can I give her up for four long years?” he demanded, fiercely, pacing the floor with long, restless strides. “How can I give her up—away from me four years she may find some one else she will love,” he moaned over and over, after he had exhausted himself walking, and flung himself on the couch.

“Joan! Joan! I love you—love you,” he cried, reaching out his arms, as if to draw her within their loving shelter. Throughout all the night the tempest raged in the soul of the man. With the coming of the dawn came peace and renunciation.

Gray was in the midst of a vivid account of some college prank when the doctor entered the hall.

Not a man there but knew something unusual was about to be announced. The doctor carried his head high, his mouth was set firm, and his whole attitude breathed of the unusual—breathed it tensely.

Gray stopped in the midst of a word, and stared with the rest at the doctor. Suddenly filled with

some nameless fear, the old minister left Gray's side and tersely demanded of the doctor, "What is it?" When he looked closer at the man, the old minister saw he was exalted rather than dejected, and fear gave way to a pleasant hope—for the old minister had often guessed the relationship that existed between the doctor and Joan. He had seen the man turn pale more than once when Joan suddenly appeared before him—had caught the paternal light in his eyes when he looked at the child.

The doctor laid his hand on Dad's shoulder. He raised his other hand as if to invoke silence where silence already reigned; then his voice rang out, clear and strong.

"I want you boys all to know my true name—I am Norman Worthington. My father was the Norman Worthington of whom you have all heard, and of whom you, Gray, were speaking just yesterday. That is not all, boys," he added, hastily, as one of them started to speak. "I am Joan's father."

There was a tense silence now. The doctor smiled. "There is nothing to be ashamed of, boys, she is my legal child. I shall tell the whole story to Dad, just as I told it to Rodney White to-night. To-morrow, Dad or I will tell you the whole story. You must all go to bed now. There is another whom I must tell to-night. Come, Dad, I shall

tell you the story. Now to bed, boys, and God bless you all."

Before any of the boys could speak he was gone.

"Come on home with me, Merrimac," Hobson said at last, breaking the tense silence that followed his departure.

"You are going with me, Merry," Gray said, softly, laying his thin hand on Merrimac's shoulder. Merrimac was looking at a book, but he was not reading.

"Merrimac is coming home with me," Hobson said, stubbornly.

Gray turned and smiled at him. "Nay, nay, Hobson, my boy, do you think I would trust a Merrimac with a Hobson?"

"You'll die joshing," Hobson grumbled, as he turned and left the hall, slamming the door behind him.

"Hope I shall, sweet-tempered youth," Gray flung after him. "Come, fellows, let's give three cheers and a tiger for the whitest man on earth, Doctor Norman Worthington, Joan's father. Three cheers and a tiger, boys! Now three more and a whooper-up for White and Dad."

When the doctor came back to the Hall of Hope, an hour later, the hall was empty. He threw him-

self in the chair Merrimac had vacated, and propped his chin up on his palms.

He awaited a message from Lois, and the hall seemed strangely quiet and silent, yet it seemed vibrating, ringing with a soft undertone of the cheers for him, which had rung out on the moon-laden air just as he knocked at the door of Lois' cottage.

CHAPTER XVII

“**I**T has been a good day,” Martha Welch said, placidly, as in the shadows of the coming night she opened the door of the little cottage, where she and Lois lived.

“‘Good’ is not the word, Martha,” Lois returned, dreamily. She stood on tiptoe, on the porch, and stretched out her arms to the moon just peeping up from behind the mountains. “This has been a day straight down from heaven—and it has not ended yet.”

Martha looked at the girl, standing there like some ancient goddess paying her tribute of praise to the Moon Spirit, and a dry smile played about her tender mouth.

Then the smile faded away, and sorrow—an old sorrow that had engraved deep lines of pain bravely borne on the kind, matronly face—set its signals at the corners of her mouth and in her kind eyes.

“Come on in, I want to talk to you, dear.”

The girl’s arms dropped to her sides. With a lingering look at the moon now riding high above the mountain peaks silvered by its bars of light, she

reluctantly followed the good Martha into the house.

Once inside she tried to speak and act naturally, but she could not. The doctor's words lingered too sweetly, and her blood was coursing too madly through her veins for calmness to come quickly.

"I must speak to Rodney first, then may I come to you at ten o'clock, Lois—dear?" Lois repeated the doctor's words softly under her breath. Yet it had been the look in his eyes rather than the words that was the key to her madly throbbing pulse.

Martha smiled at the girl, as she set the table and laid the simple meal.

"Mona is to go to Joan's for supper," she said. Lois was at the window now, peering up the road toward Rodney's cottage. She almost imagined she saw the doctor swinging up the sandy road. Ah, when he should come to her! She caught her breath sharply at the thought.

"Tea is very soothing, Lois," Martha said, dryly, as she laid a tender, motherly hand on the girl's shoulder. "And, *I* want to talk to you."

Lois turned and smiled at the woman, who caught her in her arms and pressed her close in a motherly embrace.

"Oh, Lois, dear, be kind to him," she whispered.

“Do not let the little green-eyed god spoil your life as—as I let it spoil mine. Remember, Lois, Love is the best thing in life after all, and no one is perfect, dear. You must remember that a man is different from a woman. A woman—a true woman—loves but once. Most men can love twice, Lois. My happiness was shattered because the man I loved had loved before. I pray you will not allow the same thing to blight your life. The doctor is a true man, Lois, worthy of even you.”

Lois held the older woman out from her and looked into the mild eyes, tender with love's memory.

“Martha! Martha!” she cried, as she buried her face on the woman's broad, comfortable shoulder. “How did you know? Oh, Martha! Martha! I am so happy.”

“Then keep your happiness, child. And remember that I am not blind, Lois, and—and well, never mind.”

“But I do mind, Martha, dear!” cried Lois, tender and sorry for Martha's lost dream of happiness. She was strangely atune with this older, more placid woman to-night. Her own love made her understand the other woman's brief hour in Love's paradise. She shuddered as she thought of what might be the meaning of the doctor's long silence—she

could stand anything except another woman before her.

Martha caught the look in the girl's eyes and read it aright.

"Come on to supper, Lois," she said, gently. "And you may as well prepare yourself for the other woman. How I wish some one had tried to prepare *me* for that first woman."

Lois complied and smiled at Martha, as she sipped her tea and buttered her bread. The tea and bread were excellent, but the tea could have been bitter and the bread dry and hard and buttered with sawdust, Lois would not have noticed the difference.

"I don't think *he* has done anything worse than gambling—or—or perhaps killed some one in self-defense," Lois said, cheerfully.

"What a small matter murder is compared to a first love," Martha laughed, then she grew grave. "Never send him away because of the other woman, Lois, dear. He loves you truly and honestly, he has loved you ever since that night Mona brought him to see poor Mr. Arth, and just think of all he has accomplished here at the Springs, Lois. When he tells you of the other woman just remember all he is doing to stamp out the dread disease—just remember all he has done to make the sick boys

happy and comfortable—think what he has done for me—for all of us!”

“Isn’t his work splendid?” cried Lois, forgetting to make even a pretense of eating.

“Bread is rather staying, Lois,” Martha said, quietly.

Lois blushed, and began to eat again. “Oh, he is so good!” she cried, after she had eaten steadily for perhaps a minute. “He is doing what no other man in the whole world has ever done for the poor consumptives. Think how many went away well this winter . . . well and with money in their pockets to keep them until they could prepare themselves for good positions. Would any other man do it?”

“Just think, even the president of the nation is coming to visit him here and inspect his wonderful work. One cannot pick up a newspaper these days without reading about the wonderful Consumptive Health Resort supported and ideally run by a doctor whose real name is known only to a few high in authority and to his brothers in the medical world. But to-night, Martha, dear, we shall all know who he is—he is coming at ten, Martha, and I am so happy!

“Oh, it is good, good, this work of his. Ever since I was a very little girl, and the disease robbed

me of my parents, I have dreamed of just such a place as this—but before he came, it seemed impossible that such a place could ever exist except in my dreams—it's like one of Joan's fairy tales come true, isn't it?"

"What a dear child Joan is," Martha said, smiling reminiscently, as she recalled Joan's flea-powder pie, and the child, with that rapt light in her eyes, declaring there would no harm come to any of them.

"The doctor says she is the best medicine he has for the boys except—except" Lois blushed.

"Except Lois Reeves," Martha finished, dryly.

"Isn't Joan a dear, and Mona, too?" Lois said, hastily. "I am not sure which I love the better. I am so glad there have been no other white children here since the Wards and Peysons."

"So am I. Yet they were well-behaved enough, I suppose, after Rodney showed their parents the letter that mean Major wrote to his friend the Judge. Joan and Mona seem to be all the children I want to care for. They are enough for us."

"And for each other," Lois returned. "What splendid foils they are! How true of them: 'Faithful friendship doth them both suppress, and them with mastering discipline doth tame.' The divine Spenser surely understood true friendship, Martha,

dear. You love your work here, don't you?" she added, after a long dreamy silence.

Martha came back from her own dreams with a start. "Love it, Lois, child!" she cried. "No one but my God will ever know how I love the work. The boys are so dear—all of them, and Gray especially. I wish Gray were mine, Lois, even as I have often wished you were my own little girl."

"I am yours, Martha; you are my only mother, and oh, you are such a good mother to me," she cried, passionately. "You have been as good as any mother could be to a child, ever since I first came here."

"Will you stay here—after—after . . .?" Martha faltered. She longed so, yet feared to hear the answer.

"If there is an after, Martha, dear," Lois blushed. "I'll always want to stay here—here with him and the work he loves. Life could have nothing fuller or better for me, Martha, than living—with him here. Just think of working with him, Martha, as only his wife could work with him."

Lois made no further pretense of eating. She left her chair and knelt beside Martha—and woman-like they cried in each other's arms for sheer joy.

"Keep Mona with you to-night, please, Martha,"

Lois asked, as she started to go into the room she had shared with Mona for more than two years.

"I understand; you want to be alone a while before he comes—Mona will be home soon, and I will take her in with me. I must run over to the hall now to see where my boy Gray is; he didn't come home with us, neither did the Irish lad, but it is my own boy I am worried about."

Martha kissed the girl good-night, then started for the hall. As she returned, after having seen Gray and Flannigan, she met Mona coming from Joan's, and they went in together.

Alone in her own room, Lois drew the curtains and turned on the electric light. She smiled as the light flooded the room. Electricity was another luxury which had been brought to the little village by the doctor.

An enveloping, enfolding splendor of joy seemed to hover over her and fill the room with a mystic glow. She went to her mirror, and stood there looking at herself; she felt a strange excitement as she smiled at the image reflected there. Could it be that love's fulfillment was to be her cup to drink from this night on.

The glass reflected a charming, womanly girl—incredibly feminine and alive.

This glorious reflection smiling back at her was

a marvel to Lois. She was so incomprehensibly, so superlatively happy. Her eyes, her mouth, her hands, and even her feet were gloriously happy. She seemed to have developed a perfectly preposterous capacity for enjoyment. She lifted her skirts in happy hands, and danced across the room as gracefully and ethereally as could have some woodland nymph.

She heard Martha and Mona talking, as they came in together. Later she heard Welch, as he passed and called in a happy, "good-night" to Martha. She knew it was ten o'clock then, for Prudence always sent Welch home at that hour. She heard Martha and Mona retreat to Martha's bedroom, and knew the living-room was free for her and the doctor. She gave one last look at the happy face reflected in the mirror; then turned out the light, and stood expectant in the dark—the dark that was not darkness to her—until she heard *his* knock on the door.

She went to meet him, all radiant and glowing. Half an hour later she came back to her room with lagging, weary footsteps. It was as if all life and strength had left her—as if she were suddenly very old and very feeble. She threw herself down on the side of her bed, and sat there very stiff and very straight and very still. She held herself rigid

as if she were facing a crowd of strangers who knew not of her sorrow and could not recognize her right to her grief—stranger people who constrained her to suffer in silence.

The existence of that other woman—of Joan's mother—that there ever could have been another woman before her stabbed her very soul with live flashes of pain.

She had asked for time when he stood white-faced before her at the close of his confession—the same confession he had made twice, yes, thrice before that same evening, meeting each time before understanding and pardon.

But Lois—she felt now it would take her an eternity to readjust herself to this new order of things. She would have ended it all there, when she sat facing him, as he told of that other girl with the pinched, pale face and numb fingers, and how he had taken her in his arms—would have sent him away forever, if it had not been for Martha's warning at the supper table. She had gripped her fingers around the chair rounds until they were numb, only in this way could she keep silent while he told of his happiness with that *other* woman. The doctor had told her the story of that first love as he told it to Rodney—told it as a man tells a thing to a man, forgetting he was dealing with a woman.

When he finished he realized the difference. Rodney and Dad had censured him only for keeping his marriage a secret in the beginning. Lois censured him for loving the other woman.

An hour passed; two hours, and still Lois sat there on the side of the bed. She knew the doctor was waiting at the hall for an answer from her—the answer she had half promised to send by Mona before she slept—knew that the doctor would stay at the hall until morning unless he was called to see one of the boys.

She gloried in the very thought of him waiting there alone, perhaps suffering. "Let him suffer; I am in agony," she half wailed at last, as she began to prepare for bed. She would send him no message that night—perhaps never—she might even take the morning train from the Springs and vanish from his life forever.

Her footsteps as she was undressing were hushed. She moved silently as one does when there has been a death in the house and the body lies in the next room. Something had died in the next room that night.

In bed, she lay rigid, with her face to the wall, her head covered as if to hide even the darkness from her vision. She had a strange, shivering sense of there being only a wall between her and

the dead, that something that had died out there in the living-room that night—out there in the room to which she had gone all radiant and glowing with love's celestial fire. Could it be that love lay dead out there, or was it the other woman, Joan's mother, who lay cold and silent where love had gone in triumph?

For the first time she thought of Joan comprehensively. Her own love had made her keen to read love's signals in the lives of others. She knew Rodney loved Joan with all the power of his splendidly strong nature. And more—she knew Joan unconsciously loved Rodney with the same love—knew, too, some day the awakening would come and life unfold before those two a perfect love and understanding.

She almost wished she could change places with Joan—it must be such a wonderful thing to have a heart's first love. Even Mona, the half-breed, had the first love. Graham was a splendid chap in spite of his English peculiarities—he was worthy of Mona. Then a pang for Graham shot through her. If Mona ever returned the love of Graham it would not be the heart's first love. Mona's first love was given to Rodney White. She had read the light in Mona's wonderful dark eyes—the love-light Mona tried so bravely to keep hidden from those

about her. How strange life and love were after all, she mused. Still she was comforted because Graham, if he ever won Mona, would have the second love—she was not alone. Then she sat bolt upright in bed. Martha had said, “A woman—a true woman never loves twice.” Poor Graham! Thinking of Graham, she fell asleep. She awakened in the early morning when that strange darkness, tense and baffling, hangs over the earth, just before dawn comes. At first her nerves were recharged with torture—with pain—with remembrance of that thing sleep had most mercifully hidden. Then suddenly there came a song of joy dispelling the pains of remembrance. She found herself, wrapped as she was in that sublime darkness, forgiving the mother of Joan—forgetting that dead thing in the other room. There was nothing dead out there after all. Love had only been stunned a while. Now love was gloriously, magnificently alive. Her heart was large enough now for Norman Worthington, also large enough for Joan. She had cast Joan out of her heart while she listened to the doctor; she could not love her then because she was the other woman’s child.

She began to dress herself with trembling fingers. There was no jealousy in her heart. She seemed suffused with a glowing, intense love for everything

on earth. She went into the living-room, but that room was unbearable, because she had been so cruelly unresponsive in it such a short time before. "Why did I make him wait all night for the answer—myself?" she wondered, passionately.

She went back into her own room and turned on the light—his light—her heart throbbing with joy at the very thought of it. She sat down on her bedside and was caught agreeably by the image reflected to her in the mirror. She was all womanly and sweet and glowing again. The cold, stern face that had stared at her when she last looked in the glass had startled her with its cold, dead look.

Some one tapped on her window.

She turned out the light and raised the sash. Flying Eagle stood there. "I have note for teacher," he said, thrusting a folded paper into her hand, then was off like a flash in the brightening morning.

Lois turned back in the room, and opened the note with trembling fingers. She was compelled to turn on the light before she could read the closely written lines. Her eyes were misty when she finished reading—misty with happiness.

The note ran:

"Lois, the light shining from your window tells me you are awake and bids me hope. I have been

on my knees most of the night, dear, imploring the divine giver of love for your love.

"Love is life, dear—life is love.

"I know you love me, please do not let my confession stand between us and love's fulfillment of peace and joy. I love you, Lois, as I never loved before—love you as the one man loves the one woman.

"I am on my knees now, praying you will answer love with love. I shall remain on my knees until your answer comes. God grant the answer may be yourself—my love."

"May be yourself," she repeated, with a throb of joy, as she flung a thin scarf about her head and sped out of the house.

The sky was all rosy now with the promise of a glorious day. Just one star remained to twinkle its understanding sympathy, as she searched the sky with her dark eyes, her lips trembling in a prayer of gratitude because the one man was waiting for her—on his knees.

Her blood sang as it dashed through her veins and surged through her heart with an almost suffocating tumult of joy because the answer would be herself.

When she stood at last at the door of the hall, her heart stopped its wild beating, and she

stood silent, trance-like, her hand on the door knob.

The man on his knees had heard her footsteps on the sandy path that led to the door. Her feet had scarcely touched the ground, but the ears of love are keen.

He went to the door, softly, reverently.

"I am coming, dear," she heard him say, and still she stood there; she could not have moved to save her life. Her heart gave one great exultant throb, then quivered in perfect joy when he gathered her in his arms. In a silence of perfect love and understanding they stood there until o'er the eastern sky

"—One wavelet, then another, curled,
Till the whole sunrise not to be suppress'd,
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world."

"Lois! Lois!" the man cried at last, holding her from him and looking into her eyes, lover-like.

Her eyes met his squarely, even though the pulsing red swept up from her throat—up—up until it was lost in the glory of her dark hair.

"You are my answer," he said, softly.

"Look," she whispered, "your answer for all time is written in my face."

For one tense second they stood there, reading in each other's eyes the long, glorious, perfect future.

With his arms still about her, they looked toward the mountains bathed in the dawn's bright waves, and as they looked, outlined against the tinted sky, on a jagged spur of the mountain, appeared the grim head of an Indian chief.

"Look! Look! It is Joan's mirage," Lois cried. As she spoke, the illusion of the head of the ancient chief faded from the sky, and there appeared an ancient city with its thousand spires piercing the sky. A beautiful sheet of water tumbling with white-capped billows reached from the mountain peaks to the walls of the city. A soft, vapory atmosphere hung over the sea, and a gentle tropical breeze brought into view an ancient ship which anchored just without the city walls in a sea of rippling waves.

Back of the city were cool stretches of some tropical forest, and on the crest of a hill were the tumbling towers and crumbling walls of some ancient castle.

"I have seen it many times, but never so beautiful as this," the man said, softly, as the vision faded away.

Lois turned to him rapt-eyed. "How can any

one doubt God, when He gives us so much!" she cried, passionately, lifting her arms skyward. Her loose, flowing sleeves fell back from her wrists, revealing arms of exquisite roundness.

The man, looking at them, prayed a little prayer of deepest gratitude to God and his desert for giving her health—perfect health. He shuddered as he thought of the disease which had brought her to the Springs, even as he rejoiced because she was there, but what if she had gone as had Arth and others—as poor Gray was going? He caught his breath sharply.

"Let us go to Joan," Lois said, softly. She turned to him. In her eyes he read the answer to his prayer that she would love his child.

"I love her, have always loved her," Lois whispered. "But she is dearer to me than ever this morning—for your sake."

He caught her to him rapturously.

The sun was high in the sky now, and the village was beginning to throb with the song of stirring life.

Hand in hand, the doctor and Lois went down the sandy road, glistening like a ribbon of gold under the sun's bright rays.

They found Rodney on the porch, searching the trail that led to the Cave of Rest. The man looked

pale and spent, and his eyes were anxious. Shadows of disappointment were creeping over his face, deepening the lines and emphasizing the look of weariness and strife that had been in the soul of him during the hours of the night before the spirit of renunciation came and enfolded him in its comforting embrace.

No Joan was visible, outlined against the palms as on the yesterday, and Rodney sighed as he turned to greet his friends.

"We are happy, old man," the doctor cried, joyfully, as he gripped Rodney's hands in his strong grasp.

A smile of peculiar sweetness brightened Rodney's face. He smiled at Lois as he ever smiled at Joan.

"We come to tell Joan," Lois said, softly. "Oh, man! man! Foolish man!" she exclaimed, as Rodney's face grew grave and his eyes saddened. "Don't you know you will have Joan all your life—even as Norman will have me." It was the first time Lois had spoken the doctor's name. She said it shyly, while the deep red surged over her face, then receded, leaving it tenderly glowing.

"I—I don't understand you," Rodney said, slowly. "The doctor is her father. He wants her to go off to school. She shall go. I will never stand

between her and happiness, and—and there may be some one.”

“You make me impatient.” Lois stamped her dainty foot. The doctor smiled at her, a twinkling light in his eyes.

“What do you mean?” Rodney demanded, hoarsely.

“I mean, foolish man, Joan loves you both as a child loves and as a woman loves. She is conscious of the child love—is beginning to feel the woman love. Some day, Rodney White, you will thoroughly awaken the woman love, and then—then——”

“God grant you are as happy as I am now,” the doctor supplemented, eagerly.

Rodney’s face brightened with an almost holy light. He lifted his eyes to the azure depths of the sky, and stood silent with that rapt light in his eyes with which the devotee is pictured—so might an angel look at the first glimpse of paradise.

“I’ll go in and bring Joan to—to her father,” Lois said at last, feeling she had no right there—no right to witness the holy light in the man’s eyes.

Lois went softly into Joan’s room, thinking the child might be asleep, although she knew Joan was usually up to greet the sun’s first rays of light flung athwart the desert sky.

As she crossed the threshold and saw the covers of the bed turned back, but the bed itself unrumpled, her heart seemed to be suddenly clutched in a sharp iron grasp.

Lois could never explain even to herself why she was possessed by such a nameless fear as she stood there. At that time she did not know of Rodney's fear of Chawa—the fear shared by Mona.

When she could move, she left the room softly and went in search of Prudence. She could not voice her nameless fear to the man out there enveloped in the glowing promise of love's future.

She found Prudence deep in the intricacies of her famous bread-making.

"Where is Joan?" Lois asked.

"Out mooning over the beauty of the sky and desert, I suppose," Prudence returned, dryly. "Why?" She began to mold her biscuits, and Lois stood silent an instant, admiring the woman's deftness.

"Her bed does not look as if it had been slept in. Did she stay here last night, Miss White, or did she go home with Mona? I—I was rather absorbed last night—well—I—I—but I did not hear her talking with Martha and Mona, but it is just possible that I would not have heard her were she with them."

Prudence looked at her, her pale eyes twinkling. "I expect you were not the only one absorbed last night," she said, stiffly. "But Joan was home. Mona left right after supper and Joan went directly to her room. I supposed she had gone to bed. The doctor and Rodney were in the living-room, and I—well I was," her stern features relaxed and a slow flush swept over her, changing her entire appearance. "Well, I was . . ."

"I understand perfectly, Miss White," Lois smiled understandingly, then her face saddened. She again felt that strange sense of fear she had felt in Joan's room.

"We must find Joan," she said, suddenly, and the look in her eyes caused even Prudence to feel a momentary sense of fear, but she shook it off lightly.

"You'll find her with Mona, I reckon," she said, dryly. The woman's attitude reassured Lois. She blushinglly told Prudence of her engagement to the doctor, told her the doctor's name, also told her he was Joan's father, for she shrewdly guessed that Rodney, man-like, had forgotten to tell his aunt.

"Well, I never!" Prudence gasped. She sat down weakly on the nearest chair. "Well, I never!" she repeated, then, true housewoman that she was, suddenly remembered her bread, and flew to the stove to tend to it.

"But Joan's bed does not look as if it had been slept in," Lois said, as Prudence began to set the table, Joan's task.

"What is that?" Rodney demanded.

Unheard by either of them, he had entered the room in time to hear Lois.

Lois looked at him, and her eyes fell before the look in his, as he leaned against the door for an instant, as if he was suddenly very weak.

It was difficult for Lois to voice her unknown fear to this man. She opened her lips to speak, but he was gone. They heard the door to Joan's room flung open—heard it slam shut. Caught the sound of the outer door being flung open—heard it bang to, then came the sound of running feet on the hard path, and—when Lois reached the porch, the doctor was standing in amazed silence, looking after the swiftly running figure of a man, almost opposite the hall.

"It's Rodney," the doctor explained, as Lois gasped and pointed at the vanishing figure. "He ran by me just now. He looked perfectly wild. 'It's that damned half-breed!' he shouted, and was down the road before I could even think of stopping him. He seemed perfectly sane when he went in to see if breakfast was ready—wanted us to remain for breakfast, in fact."

Hurriedly, Lois told the doctor of her own nameless fear, caused by the unrumpled bed.

"But surely Rodney did not mean Mona," the doctor exclaimed, as they started down the road to the hall.

"No, no, he must mean Chawa," Lois panted.

They found a wild-eyed Martha at the cottage. "Mr. White just left here," Martha explained, her voice quivering. "He acts like a crazy man—do you think he has gone suddenly insane, doctor? He wanted to see Mona. It is queer, but we could not awaken Mona. I tried first, and then he rushed in there." She pointed to her bedroom. "He shook Mona like a cat shakes a mouse, but she still sleeps on; she did not stir even when he flung her down with an oath. Oh, oh, what does it all mean?" Her voice quavered. "You look as if you had seen ghosts, too, both of you. What is the matter? It has been a terrible time to me ever since last night when I saw it . . ."

"Saw what?" the doctor thundered.

"It," Martha repeated, dully. "If I believed in ghosts, I would believe I saw one last night; as it is, I must have seen an omen. Some shadowy form was bending over Mona when I awakened suddenly, just before you came last night," she spoke directly to the doctor. "I could not have been

asleep more than half an hour. I raised up in bed, and it vanished. I lay there and shivered most of the night; I seemed to be conscious of everything but was powerless to move or call out. There was such a queer smell in the room it seemed to take my breath. It was so sweet and sickening. You can smell it in there now, and . . .”

“I’ll see Mona,” the doctor interrupted, tersely. He turned to Lois. “Tell her about—about Joan,” his voice quivered.

When he came back from Mona’s room, a moment later, his eyes glittered and his mouth was stern set.

“Your ghost was real, Martha—an omen of the devil. Your awakening saved you from a good sound sleep. Your sweet smell is chloroform. I opened the windows. Mona will wake up in a few hours.” He was gone.

Lois gasped and sank weakly into the nearest chair. What could it all mean? She flung her arms about Martha, as the good woman bent over her, and they quivered and sobbed together.

The doctor and the old minister came back to the cottage, Welch close at their heels, all of them white-faced and steely-eyed.

“Rodney is out on Solomon,” the old man panted.

“On Solomon!” Lois cried, clutching her breast.

“When was he brought back?” she demanded.

"What does it all mean? Tell me quick, Norman. Do you know where Joan is—is she hurt?" She never forgot the look the three men gave her.

"We don't know where she is, dear," the doctor said, gently. "We pray she is—is not hurt. As for Solomon, I was the cause of his being brought back, God help me," groaned the doctor. "Rodney had him brought back for me. I wanted a horse to drive. Rodney and I thought were he well broken he would be just the horse I need. O God, that he had not been brought back!"

For almost three years, King Solomon had run wild with a herd of Indian ponies in a canyon where there was plenty of water and wild grass in abundance.

"O God! God! he may be killed," he groaned. "I reached the corral just in time to see Rodney dash away on him. Rodney's face was like death, his eyes were blazing like fire. Joan! Joan! Little Joan!" he moaned, forgetting Rodney in his agony over the child.

"I understand all too plainly why he rode King Solomon," the old minister said, quietly. "He is the only horse in the village—everything is gone, even the Shetland ponies are missing."

The cunning of the Indian and the villainy of the Major were set forth in that sentence.

"Look! Look!" Martha cried, sharply. Through the open door she had caught a glimpse of a sight that sent chill waves of terror to the hearts of them all, as their eyes followed hers up the road toward the Indian burying ground, just as Don came dashing around the corner of the house, barking his excitement because of the unusual, felt in the very air.

For an instant Rodney, on the big black, was outlined against the white headstones, then the big brute wheeled and with thundering hoofs dashed past the cottage. Rodney tugged in vain at the reins; King Solomon held the bit gripped tight in his wicked teeth.

Just beyond the hall, where the road turned slightly, King Solomon wheeled again, and once more thundered past the cottage. On—on into the old burying ground went the wild beast.

"Oh! Oh! he will go into the well," Lois cried, her face blanching.

The doctor drew her to him protectingly. "We will pray not, dear," he said, softly.

The thought of that ancient well, like the deep terraced well into which the old minister had fallen in Tellput, had sent its flashes of terror to the hearts of them all. In the very center of the burying ground was the yawning open mouth, with its crum-

bling steps leading down to the placid pool of water in the center of the square at the bottom of the ragged walls.

Suddenly the old minister knelt beside the collie, put his arms about his neck, and whispered something in his ear. Don bristled, but never made a sound, but his upper lip curled until one could catch a glimpse of strong, white teeth, and then he was off like a flash, after the plunging black.

It all happened in less than a minute, but it seemed an eternity to the terrified group, before the dog reached the side of the horse. They saw Don give a long, swinging jump and fasten his jaws on the big black's nose; then the rude crosses and gleaming headstones that marked the graves of the bygone Indians hid the plunging horse and the flash of gold from view.

When they reached the burying ground, they found Rodney in a crumpled heap at the very edge of the well. His face was gray and drawn and looked strangely old. His eyes were closed; his breath coming short and painfully.

"His leg is broken—that is all," the doctor announced, huskily, when he had assured himself that Rodney's heart action was good though feeble. "I'll give him an injection," he added. Baring his friend's arm, he shot the needle in.

"Now we will get him home," he said, briskly, as he straightened up. His face was pain-drawn and his broad shoulders stooped a little, while his eyes were dimmed as though by mist.

"He will be all right in a few days, Dad," he said, softly. The old minister rose from his knees beside his friend, where he had been kneeling in silent prayer.

"Thank God—I love him as a son, aye he is the son of my old age."

"Lois! Lois! I might have expected this of you." The doctor turned to face Lois and Welch, who had run from the hall with a canvas cot, upon which they tenderly placed the injured man.

"He will not regain consciousness until after I have set his leg," the doctor answered the question in her eyes. "He will be all right soon, little girl, especially if we find Joan quickly."

"Where is Don?" Lois asked, her voice quivering. "Dear old Don, he saved him."

"Come back," the doctor said, sharply, as Lois started toward the well. "Solomon is dead down there."

"Don is there, too," she flashed back, as she started down the crumbling steps.

"Stay with her, Dad, please," the doctor said, huskily. "We must get Rodney home quickly."

Don lay on top of the black horse, an inert, golden heap. In an instant, Lois was feeling over his body. In the dim light down there by the dead horse and the dark pool of water she felt strangely alone and not a little frightened. She gathered Don up in her strong young arms and picked her way back up the steps.

The old minister had sent Martha after a pail of water when they first reached the scene of the accident. Martha again reached the spot just as Lois reached the ground again, with Don in her arms.

Martha did not usually lose her head, but she had lost it this time and was blubbering like a baby.

"Good old chap," the old minister said, softly, kneeling beside Don, as Lois sat down with the dog in her arms.

"He's alive, Dad. He is alive!" Lois cried. "Give me some water quick, Martha."

Martha gave her the pail of water, and Lois began to bathe an ugly cut on the dog's head with a ridiculously small handkerchief.

"Don! Don!" Lois cried. As if in answer to her call Don opened his eyes, and even tried to wag his tail.

"He will be the same old Don as ever by to-morrow," the old minister said, gratefully. Don

wagged his tail, stronger this time, and looked understandingly into the three faces bending over him.

When Rodney regained consciousness, his first words were, "Joan! Joan!"

A queer thing happened to Prudence the minute she heard his voice. All at once there surged over her a tender, trembling, overpowering flood of love. Crooning words, such as a mother uses to her child, trembled on her tongue yet refused to be uttered. Her calm demeanor suddenly left her—vanished, too, that stern, unemotional rock behind which she had so often hidden the softer feelings which had for some time been struggling to be recognized. Her heart throbbed wildly in her breast, and for the first time since she had outgrown her pinafores, she wanted to cry, wanted to sob as she had seen other women sob—she had thought them crazy then—now she knew they had been divinely sane.

At last she could speak. "Rodney! Rodney! My own Rodney," she cried, as she flung herself down beside Rodney, and for the first time gathered him close in her arms and crooned over him like a mother.

When she recovered herself, she and Rodney were alone together.

"Aunt Prue, I always wanted you to hug me," Rodney said, boyishly, nestling in her arms.

"Oh, Rodney! Rodney! how wrong and cold I have been. Rodney! Rodney!" Her pale eyes were aglow with light, her cheeks were softly flushed. She knew her transition, from a stern, unresponsive woman into a glowing, throbbing new creation, with a wealth of awakened maternal love surging through her heart, had been witnessed by more than Rodney, but that did not disturb her in the least. She was a new woman—a real woman at last, and she cared not if all the world knew it.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE light of a barbaric lover mingled with the savagely triumphant light in the eyes of Chawa, as Joan stood white-faced before him, her hands clutching her heart in a nameless fear that held her captive.

Chawa folded his arms and stood silent a pace below her ; his shoulders were squared, and his head held high, like the royal-blooded savage he was.

In the silver light of the moon, he looked like some young god, so perfectly was he modeled.

So they stood there silent, until Joan unconsciously drew her lithe form erect. Her hands fell to her sides—the shadow of fear in her eyes gave way to a fearless glow.

“Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night, nor the arrow that flyeth by day,” seemed to be spoken to her by some inner voice, dispelling that nameless fear. Yet, young as she was, she realized Chawa’s attitude toward her.

She moved as if to pass him on the narrow trail. He blocked her way with outstretched arms.

“Chawa loves the maiden of sunshine,” he said,

softly, his low, musical voice quivering with a soft, caressing note. His eyes were steady and flashing as ever, yet in them was also written his savage love . . . a dark flush glowed under the dusky skin of his cheeks.

"Don't be a fool, Chawa," Joan snapped. She was beginning to be angry.

"I, Chawa, love the maiden with eyes of scorn," said the unruffled Chawa. "I, Chawa, in whose veins flows the blood of many great chiefs, such as the pale face race knows not, love the maiden of sunshine and scorn. . . . For her I have forsaken the ways of the Indian—my ways. For her I have become even as the palefaced man with whom she has lived." His eyes were softer now, aglow with love.

"You make me tired," Joan cried, stamping her foot. "I am ashamed of you, Chawa. You are silly. I am going home."

"I think not." Chawa's voice rang out like the snap of a whip, as Joan lightly swerved to one side, eluded his outstretched arms, and darted past him.

"I think not," he repeated, with a snarl, as with long, swinging strides he overtook her and caught her in his arms.

His face was changed now, contorted with Indian

ferocity. He crushed the trembling, little form to him, laughing aloud in savage triumph. The spirit of his white father prompted the kisses he began to shower on the pale, little face, the blue eyes glowing like wells of fire.

"Ah, the palefaced maiden would scorn the love of Chawa, would she?" he demanded, ceasing to kiss the scornful, upturned face.

Joan's eyes flashed, but her mouth was set tight in a stern little white line.

Chawa laughed, kissed her again, then started up the trail, bearing her in his arms.

At the Cave of Rest he hesitated an instant, then went on again, chuckling triumphantly.

Up—up to the very top of the ridge of the low mountain he went with the ease and grace of a panther.

The burden in his arms was not a light one, but he carried it as if it were a feather's weight.

At the crest of the ridge, where a huge white rock barred the ridge of the mountain toward Lone Pine Ridge, he stood Joan on her feet and fumbled an instant at the rock. It swung back, and on the other side lay a dim trail leading along the ridge of the mountain to the lonely cabin under the great pine tree. Chawa drew Joan through the opening; the rock swung back into place; he took Joan in his

arms again, and carried her for fully a mile. He did not speak again until he set her on her feet.

"Look," he said, briefly, pointing to the moon riding high in the zenith. "Look, oh maiden of sunshine, princess of the moonlight, the smile of the Moon God is upon us. The great Moon Spirit is pleased with Chawa because he has taken the maiden with the laughing eyes for his own."

Joan looked at him scornfully, then her gaze was held by the beauty of the night. Under the soft effulgence of the moon, the shifting sand hills and vast stretches of sand, dotted with greasewood and cacti, lay half revealed, half hidden. In the mystic dome of the sky countless myriads of stars blazed in magic splendor, woven as they were, by a divine hand, in the rich tapestry of the heavens.

"Oh! Oh! It is beautiful, beautiful," Joan cried, forgetting Chawa, forgetting everything except the matchless glory of the night. Never had the divine presence seemed so near to her. She felt wrapped in the sheltering folds of the unseen but protective love.

So they stood there in the splendor of the night, silent. So near and yet so many countless ages apart were the souls of them, revealed by the pale, phosphorescent light of the desert moon.

Chawa's voice broke the silence. "Ah, you love it so," he said, softly.

"Love it! Love it! Yes, yes, I love it." Joan wheeled toward him, half dazzling him with the radiance of her eyes.

Never before had she seemed so desirable to Chawa, never so unattainable. They were alone in the heart of a vastness so great as to be almost appalling, still she seemed something set apart from him, as unreachable as were the moon and stars.

So silent was the night they could hear the faint beatings of their own hearts. Silent, yet throbbing with the strains of divine music. It was as if the very hand of God was playing a matchless melody on a marvelous instrument. The mountains, the silvered stretches of sand, the low drifting sand hills and the dark-shadowed canyons were the strings, quivering and thrilling under their master's touch.

"Come," Chawa said at last, but he did not touch her, a strange something seemed to stand between them.

"Yes, let us return to the village," Joan returned, softly. "Chawa, I thank you for this glorious vision." She stretched her arms toward the shifting sand hills rippling and glistening in the moonlight.

"Come, Chawa, let us go home and forget to-

night, all but this." His eyes followed hers over the moon-kissed stretches. At that instant he might have obeyed her, but a noxious voice broke the charm of sublimity. It was only an innocent burro braying his gratitude to the moon, but it shattered the divine harmony of the night for Chawa.

"Come," he said, roughly, taking Joan by the shoulder. "It is time to cease dreaming under the Moon God."

Joan struggled for freedom, striking Chawa with her small, clenched hands.

He laughed at the impotent blows, his eyes glowed with a dangerous barbaric intensity as he dragged her along the ridge of the mountain until they reached the deserted cottage under the lone pine tree.

"You've been long enough getting here," a voice growled. Chawa suddenly passed a handkerchief about Joan's eyes, and drew it tight.

"Why didn't you do that before, you young fool," the same voice snarled. With a start Joan recognized the voice as the Major's.

"Shut up," Chawa retorted. He lifted Joan in his strong, young arms, and carried her into the cottage.

When the bandage was removed from her eyes, in the dim light from a smoky lantern near the

door, Joan saw she was alone with Chawa, in a room in which a bed with rumpled blankets, a rickety chair, and a small sheet-iron stove were the only pieces of furniture. Through a half-closed inner door she caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure which she knew to be the Major's.

"Rodney will settle with you, you dirty sneaks," she blazed. "I hate you, hate you! hate you both! I demand to be taken home immediately. Let me out of here and I will go home alone. Oh, oh," she wailed, "please let me out of here; I want to go home to Rodney!"

At the mention of Rodney's name all the pent-up savageness of Chawa seemed to be suddenly freed from the restraining bonds of civilization. He caught Joan to him in savage passion.

"You are mine—mine!" he exulted. "Soon I shall bring a priest, and you shall become the bride of Chawa. You love Mona. Her parents are also my parents; why do you not love Chawa?"

"You! You! I hate you, I hate you!" Joan cried, striking at the dark, flushed face.

Chawa laughed. "Hate Chawa, do you, oh maiden with eyes of scorn? Take this for your hate of Chawa," he laughed, kissing her trembling lips. "Chawa cares not at all that his maiden hates him. Chawa's love is all-sufficient with the object

of that love in his arms. Some day the maiden will return the love of Chawa—some day when the smoke from our tepee rises upward and is lost in the breeze blowing in from the sea, for Chawa and the palefaced maiden will go westward until the great body of water that laps the western shore ripples for our delight. We will live as lived the forefathers of my mother's people, oh, maiden whose eyes can laugh as well as shoot flashes of fire. Some day you will laugh and smile at Chawa, your master.

“You will forget the palefaced man you smile upon now, for you love the call of nature, you will love the care-free life we shall live in our wigwam by the sea. Were it not for a foolish desire to finally win the love of the scornful maiden, Chawa would not bring a priest to wed him and the maiden, after the manner of the white-faced people. But the love of the sunlight maiden *must* be Chawa's some day.”

Holding her tightly in one arm, he tip-tilted her chin with the long, slender fingers of his free hand. He laughed exultantly, looking into the blue eyes, almost black now, so full of quivering fire were they. “Until you are all Chawa's,” he said, lightly, kissing the quivering lips.

“Quit that, you young fool; we must get back

to the village before we are missed. But for your fool idea of having a priest we would have been on our way before now. My revenge would be sweeter were the priest omitted," grumbled the Major from the inner room.

Chawa's eyes blazed, but he freed Joan. Like a flash she sped into the other room.

"Major Phillips! Major Phillips!" she cried. "I am sure you will not leave me here. Think of your mother, please. Major Phillips, she would not want you to leave a poor, little helpless girl up here with an Indian. Please take me back to Rodney, Major Phillips."

The pleading note in the liquid voice, and the reference to his mother moved the Major, and appealed to a certain chivalry latent in all Southerners, but the mention of Rodney's name hardened him.

"Take your wild cat, Chawa," he snarled, pushing Joan from him, "and may you have joy of her in that wigwam you have been mooning about. Here, I'll fix her myself," he added, grimly, drawing her back to him. "Now forward march," he commanded, briskly, pushing her before him into the other room. He knelt suddenly and snapped a steel bracelet around her right ankle. The bracelet was attached to a three-foot chain securely fastened by an iron ring in the floor behind the little stove.

Arms folded, eyes aglow with savage passion, Chawa watched the Major until he had finished, then with a low bow to Joan, he silently left the room.

The Major drew a package from each coat pocket and laid them beside Joan on the dusty floor.

"Bread and water," he said, shortly. "I've lived on it in my day. Chawa will be back before you realize it. You will have a sweet time as the squaw of the young devil.

"You can reach that bed if you want to lie down. It is just as it was left when they lifted Greenleaf out of it a few months after he died up here alone. Nice place this for that imagination of yours to get busy in. Hope Greenleaf's ghost don't bother you." He laughed shortly, his beady eyes glittering triumphantly.

"There are no ghosts, Major Phillips," Joan returned, firmly, looking the Major straight in the eyes. Her level glance caused a slow flush to sweep over his face.

"You are a villain," Joan continued, calmly. "You should be ashamed of yourself, Major Phillips, but God is with me and will rescue me, so I am not afraid as you would like for me to be. I shall be glad when I am alone. I hate you, but I shall try to pray for you. I shall also pray for

Chawa, although I hate him too, but I shall most earnestly pray that your hearts may be softened”

“Chawa’s is soft enough now about you,” the Major interrupted, with a short laugh. “I do not care for your prayers, young lady, do not need them. You had better pray for yourself. Your master will not be an angel; I know him. Chawa is a devil. You will learn much of the devil soon to offset some of your religious knowledge. You will wish you *were* a Brahma before you have lived long in that wigwam Chawa speaks so flowery about now. When you are old and ugly like all squaws get in time, I shall come to call on you.” He laughed again, and went out, locking the door behind him. He carried with him the smoky lantern, leaving Joan alone with the shadows shot by the flickering light of the moon glimmering in through the window shaded by the lone pine tree.

When she was alone, Joan went the length of her chain every direction. She found she could, as the Major had said, reach the bed, likewise the rickety chair.

She sat down in the chair, and tried to think calmly. “Oh, if I had only promised Mona outright to stay at home,” she moaned. “She must

have imagined something like this would happen if I left home to-night. Oh, Mona! Mona! if I had only promised you!"

She straightened her shoulders and drew her lips tightly together. She tried bravely to think of other things beside herself.

"The doctor says there are millions and millions of tubercular bacilli in all of these places," she said, aloud, as if imparting a choice bit of information to some one.

"There may be millions on my feet by this time, but I am not afraid of a single one of them." Her voice trailed off into shaky silence.

"I must remember the Lord of Hosts is here," she whispered, firmly, trying to pull herself together.

"I am glad I have you, dear little mother," she whispered, opening the locket. She could not see the wistful-eyed, miniaturesd face, but she pressed it close to her cheek. "It would have happened some day, since it did happen, so it is just as well it happened to-night as any time." She was beginning to be philosophically cheerful, when the long, wailing, eerie howl of a hungry coyote broke the stillness of the night and shattered every bit of her courage.

She flung herself on her knees beside the chair

and sobbed and cried aloud in her agony of fear until the day dawned.

When the first flickering light of the sun came creeping into the dusty room, she grew calm, and was heartily ashamed of her terror of the night.

“Joan Worthington, you are nothing but a coward, and you have always professed to be very brave. I am ashamed of you,” she said, firmly. “You know Rodney will come for you to-day. Won’t it be lovely to have to tell him how sniveling you were all night. I am ashamed of you, thoroughly ashamed of you.” Her eyes flashed, and a little color found its way to the pale cheeks, as she grew more courageous in her self-abasement. Nevertheless, her eyes filled with tears the instant she ceased talking; it was as if the sound of her voice gave her courage. She began again. “You know Rodney will come for you to-day. You must not let him find you weak-jointed, blubbering like a baby. I have no patience with you. Get down on your knees and pray, Joan Worthington; if you ever needed the Lord, you need Him now.”

She flung herself on her knees beside the bed, with never a thought of microbes, and the prayer she prayed was truly characteristic.

When she arose from her knees, she felt calmed, recharged with hope.

Noon found her still hopeful, listening for the sound of Rodney's voice. But the noon hour passed and she was still alone. Lengthening shadows across the floor heralded the rapid coming of the night.

Suddenly she thought of Job. She opened the door of the little stove, and her eyes brightened with fanatic intensity as they fell upon the heap of ashes within.

With a small stick she found on the floor near her, she scooped the ashes out on the floor and scattered them about until she had a circle large enough for her to sit in with her feet drawn up under her Turk fashion.

"I'll imagine I'm Job," she addressed the chair. "It will make it easier to stay until Rodney comes," her voice broke, but she heroically smiled through the tears that misted her eyes.

"I haven't any boils," she said, cheerfully. She smiled bravely, determined to enjoy the game. "So I have no need of a potsherd to scrape myself withal. That is fortunate, for I am sure there is no potsherd here. I wonder what a potsherd is?" she reflected, as she made herself comfortable, her back against the stove. Suddenly she remembered that there was no mention of a stove to support Job's back.

"Sit up straight," she commanded herself,

sternly. She frowned, for the thought of the potsherd still lingered, disturbing her idea of the completeness of things. Like a flash she remembered the stick she had spread her ashes with.

"I'll imagine you are the potsherd." She picked the stick up and eyed it tentatively. "I can imagine it very easily because I do not know what a real potsherd is like. Now, I'll scrape myself withal and open my mouth and speak as did Job. How extremely fortunate it is that I am conversant with Job."

She began at the beginning of Job, and skimmed lightly through it, her voice vibrating with her interest in the play. She impersonated Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar each in his turn, her voice changing with the shifting of the characters. She was lost in her own dramatization of the sacred epic, and was unconscious of the sand-storm sweeping over the desert world. The play went on until the room was filled with ghostly shadows, and still she held herself rigid, still was she lost in the play, but her voice was tired and shaky while she impersonated Elihu, but when she came to Job speaking with the Lord, her voice rang out, pregnant with the majesty of the words she spoke.

She had not eaten any of the food the Major left her. She scorned to even touch it, and the pangs

of healthful hunger shot through her. She welcomed them. Job had fasted, so would she fast.

"So Job died, being old and full of days," she ended the play, with a little regretful sigh. The room was dark now, and her courage began to ebb away as the shadows deepened.

She straightened her tired little shoulders with an impatient shrug. "You are not old and full of days," she said, sternly. "Just remember that Job's afflictions did not last always, neither will yours. And 'the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning,'" she whispered, softly. "So will he bless me." In the thought of how she could be more blessed than she had been since she came to Rodney out of the storm, she forgot the fear night had brought with it. Gradually she leaned farther back until finally she rested against the stove and so fell asleep.

When Mona recovered from the effects of the chloroform that day, the doctor hurried with her to Rodney.

The doctor had listened to the advice of the old minister. There must be some system in the search made for Joan. The old minister counseled waiting until Mona awakened before making a move; he knew Mona would be invaluable in the search.

Chawa and the Major were both much in evidence in the little village that morning. As long as they were there, the men felt that the child was safe. They believed the Major and Chawa had kidnapped Joan, because Rodney asserted he was sure of it. Of Chawa's love for Joan, Rodney told no one. Every one in the village knew the Major hated both Joan and Rodney, and it seemed natural to them he should use Chawa to aid him in his nefarious plans.

The slowness of the doctor, Dad, and Welch rasped on Rodney's nerves. He wanted them to go post-haste in their search of the child, and when the doctor and Mona entered his room he was almost beside himself.

"Where is she?" he demanded, raising himself on his elbow and glaring at Mona.

Mona's eyes were somber with pain.

"I know not," she returned, in her soft, musical voice.

"Bah!" Rodney flung at her. "Once an Indian always an Indian. Fool that I have been to allow Joan with you so much. Tell me quick, where is she?"

The pained light in Mona's eyes deepened.

"Rodney, you are beside yourself. You are saying things you will regret later on," the doctor

said, quietly, his heart throbbing with pity for Mona.

"Shut up," Rodney growled. All the savage in him rasped in his voice. He felt like some chained thing, bound down as he was by his broken limb.

The doctor's voice somewhat sobered him. He fell back on his pillow and flung his arm across his face, while hot tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Poor old chap," the doctor said, gently, laying his hand on Rodney's arm.

Rodney flung the hand off impatiently, and again raised himself upon his elbow, facing Mona with an angry light in his eyes.

"Why don't you speak?" he thundered.

"My love for my friend, Joan, is as the waters of the sea, unfathomable," she returned, softly, her head regally erect. "I promised her my eternal friendship under the shade of the twin palms where gathers the dust blown by the four winds. I swore that friendship by the God of my white father, by the Great Spirits of my mother's race. The love of Mona, the half-breed, for the child Joan is eternal. I love her, I would have saved her this if I could; I warned you. I thought she would stay home last night," her voice quivered, she had taken Joan's declaration of affection as a promise. She knew her little friend would not have broken a

promise, yet it hurt her because she had disregarded the binding power of the implied promise. She turned toward the window and stretched her arms out in a sweeping movement, taking in the low, shifting sand hills, the mountain ridges, and the stretches of sand lying between.

"Somewhere out there, Mona will find her friend."

She turned back to Rodney. "I, Mona, swear by the God of your people I will bring her back to you. I will give my life for her if need be, but if I bring her not back myself, through me she shall come back to you." Her eyes had in them the look of some priestess of ancient days.

"Come here, Mona," Rodney said, boyishly, his eyes misty. "I am ashamed of myself," he added, humbly.

Mona came, treading softly, like a stately goddess, her eyes glowing with a soft, sweet light.

"Forgive me," Rodney said, entreatingly. His voice was peculiarly sweet and wistful now.

Into Mona's eyes came a look that dazzled him, so full of love and a worship that was something infinitely greater than love. The look passed swiftly and her eyes were grave, steady, inscrutable.

"I would forgive you anything," she said, softly,

so softly that only Rodney heard her. "I go now to seek my friend."

"You are a trump, yes, an angel," Rodney called after her.

"Forgive me, old man," he held out his hand to the doctor. "I know I acted like a cad, but I've been half wild ever since I've been tied down here."

"I know, old chap," the doctor returned, pressing the hand he held. "You are certainly pardoned. Mona and I will go now. The villains forgot the burros, thank God, so we are not forced to go afoot."

When they were gone, Rodney turned his face to the wall, groaning, "O God! God! If I could only go, too." He struck the wall with his knuckles until they were raw.

"O my God! My God! Save her, save her," he pleaded over and over. "I love her with every fiber in me. My mind, my heart, my very soul stirs with love for her, as my violin vibrates under the touch of my fingers.

"O God! God! I have always believed you sent her to me that night. I have always thought you intended her to be my life's companion in the highest sense of the word in a life of perfect love—love purified, intensified, spiritualized. O my Father,

do not let her go from me in this horrible manner. If she is not to be mine, let it be death that separates us, not this terrible thing I fear. Oh, that I had never brought her here. If I had only come alone, but I loved her then; loved as I did not then realize I could love any living creature. Child that she was I loved her as a man loves the spirit of his mate. O God! God! I love her, love her." He buried his face in his hands and sobbed with grief and fear until the doctor coming in, just before the little band of searchers started, mercifully put him to sleep with a soothing injection.

Half a mile from the village, with a cry of sullen fury a sweep of wind enveloped the searchers in a pale, gray pall of sand. They forced their way on for a quarter of a mile or more, while the sand beat at their faces with impish fury.

"We'll have to go back, boys," the old minister said at last, his voice hoarse and quivering. "We cannot go on in this. We cannot see our hands before us, how can we find our child? We must wait until the storm ceases, then start again."

Like the fierce leaping of the waves of a storm-swept sea the sand under them leaped and eddied, flinging itself upon them, stinging them with its sharp impact, almost suffocating them with its density.

Over the swirling tide of sand they made their way back to the hall, silent, worried. Not until they reached the hall did they notice Mona was not with them.

For hours the storm raged and the wind tore in fury at the roof of the Hall of Hope and rattled the windows in fiendish glee.

Through it all Graham walked the floor, racked with fear for Mona.

In little huddled groups the men talked together. All were somber, even Gray making no effort to bring cheer to them while the storm moved majestically over the desert earth.

Toward the end of the storm the sun glimmered through the flying sand, turning it red as blood.

Graham walked with unsteady feet now—walked as a man walks under a heavy load.

“Come sit down, Graham,” Gray said at last, laying his thin hand on Graham’s shoulder.

Graham obeyed him, noticing as he did so Gray’s breath was coming painfully short and fast and his eyes were glitteringly bright with a fixed look in them.

“You had better lie down, old chap. By Jove, but you are about all in,” Graham said, as he flung himself in a great armchair facing the window. The sand was beating against the window in its last

fling of rage, and to Graham the world outside in its storm-swept majesty was something terrible to look upon. Mona was out in the storm and his heart was sick within him. He looked up at Gray.

"By Jove, *you* are sick, old chap," he cried.

Gray smiled at him, then his face was suddenly distorted with pain. Again he smiled as the pained look faded from it.

"You are batty, Graham," he returned, with a smile Graham never forgot, as he clutched at his throat.

"Doctor Worthington," Graham called, sharply.

"That's right, ball a man out when he is about all in," Gray said, with a laugh that was almost a cry of pain.

He staggered, but by a supreme effort recovered himself—a smile played about his pain-drawn lips.

"Clear out, you rubes," he said, gaspingly, as a little group closed in about him. "This—is—my—funeral."

Again came the pain that distorted the face over which the gray pallor of death was already surging.

Suddenly he raised both hands. For one long minute he looked straight up into the face of God. Then he fell.

"I'm going fast, boys," he rallied, with an effort. His lips jerked in a vain attempt to smile. "But,

smile—boys—smile. Don't—look—so—solemn—the joke's—on—me." He smiled now, a glorious smile of joy, a smile that was never forgotten by those who saw it.

When the doctor reached him he was dead.

"I always said he would die joking," the doctor said, huskily, as he raised the limp form tenderly in his arms.

At the door he met Martha Welch.

Martha gave a cry when she looked into Gray's face. The doctor silenced her with a sharp, "There are things worse than death, Martha."

Martha caught her breath sharply. His words recalled Joan alone somewhere at the mercy of a savage and a villain. She led the way to Gray's tent silently. Not until after the doctor had gone did she allow herself to grieve over the boy she had loved best of all the brave fellows about her.

When the sand-storm had passed the entire desert world seemed to have been clarified, purified, as if God himself had been in the heart of the tempest.

Once more the doctor, Dad, and Welch started on the quest for Joan. They were headed toward the lone cabin on the crest of Lone Pine Ridge. There Mona, reading her brother aright, had thought they would find Joan.

It was dusk now, and the habitually solemn face

of Welch was no more sorrowful than were the faces of the other two men as they urged their slow, plodding burros on over the sandy stretches, glistening now in placid content.

Swirling and stinging had been the same sand when Mona slipped silently away from the three men when they turned back to the village because of its baffling intensity.

"There is need for great haste," she whispered, as she bent her body to the fury of the storm.

No one knew so well as Mona the haste that was indeed needed. Mona had gone to Chawa after she left Rodney. She had pleaded with him with all the intensity of her passionate nature, but he had met her entreaties with exultant, triumphant taunts.

"She shall never be yours," Mona had cried at last.

"So!" Chawa flung at her. "We shall see." He sprang toward Mona just as the Major came up behind them.

"What now, you young fool?" the Major growled, taking Chawa by the shoulder.

"Fool yourself," Chawa hissed, wrenching himself free. A knife flashed in the sunlight. "I've had enough of you and your bossing," Chawa panted, crouching panther-like, his lithe body trembling with rage.

"Put up your knife, Chawa," Mona commanded, sharply, as the Major drew his revolver. "If you hurt him, I'll kill you," she said, turning on the Major.

There was that in her voice which compelled obedience. The Major lowered the weapon. Chawa returned the knife to his bosom. And so they stood there for one memorable instant, all of them trembling with anger and hate.

"I know where Joan is," Mona said at last. "I shall save her from you both. I shall give my life for hers, if need be, but save her I shall," and her voice rang with passion. She turned to Chawa. "Henceforth you are no brother of mine." She whirled on the Major, hissing, "You should be burned for your part in this. Shame on you, shame on you for the coward's part you have played!"

For an instant she stood there holding them both by the light in her eyes.

She turned at last. She had gone but a few steps when the sounds of a struggle caused her to turn.

The Major was prone on his back, Chawa was just rising to his feet; in his hands he held the Major's revolver.

"So, you would shoot, eh?" she heard Chawa say, then he spurned the Major with his foot.

"I'll get even with you," the Major snarled.

Mona did not linger longer. With the Major and Chawa hostile to one another the danger to Joan was intensified.

She shuddered as she urged her burro on through the storm of stinging sand.

It was a mad concerto played within the desert borders that day—a concerto of crashing chords of the fierce, the defiant and defensive, with plaintive running notes of the sublime running through it.

“O God of my father. Great Spirits of my mother’s people, I pray I may reach my friend before they do,” Mona prayed over and over, as she struggled on through the whipping, lashing scourge of sand.

She reached the crest of Lone Pine Ridge half an hour after the last wild note of the dirge of the elements died away. The lone cabin looked peaceful, friendly under the tender light of the moon. The song of the night was sweet and soothing, and Mona’s heart throbbed with joy. She must be in time, after all.

Just as she leaped from the burro and started toward the sagging door, Chawa darted around the house from one side, the Major from the other. Almost before she realized their presence, so suddenly and silently had their coming been, a shot rang out and the Major fell in his tracks, almost at her

feet. With a cry she sprang toward Chawa. As if in answer to her cry a lonely coyote gave a mourning, long-drawn howl—a howl such as the Indians claim they ever give when a soul takes its flight to the land of the great unknown.

CHAPTER XIX

“**C**HAWA! Chawa!” Mona cried, her voice tense with pain.

Chawa laughed, a ringing, mocking, triumphant laugh, covering her with the still smoking revolver.

“I shall give you a dose of the same medicine I gave the white dog if you try to stop me,” he cried, his voice shrill in the intensity of his passion. He laughed again, such a laugh as might have escaped from the great Fighting Wolf, as he nodded lightly toward the Major, over whose face the death shadow was drawn in a hideous gray contortion.

Mona shuddered as her eyes followed his. She had disliked the Major in life, but the Major in death with his distorted face upturned to the moon was a something to be pitied, even though he deserved his fate.

“Oh, Chawa! Chawa! My brother, why did you do it?” She came close to him now, and still he held the revolver, its cold, gleaming barrel pointed straight at her heart. She felt strangely unafraid of that gleaming thing that had felled the

Major, and her voice grew sweet and tender as she spoke again.

"Chawa," she said, softly, "I said once to-day you were no longer a brother of mine. I was very angry then, but now I am sorry because you, my brother, are in danger. It is a serious thing to kill a man, Chawa, my brother. You are in grave danger and the ties of blood are strong. I will help you flee from this place, Chawa, my brother. Come, make haste, the men will soon be here. They must not find you here with that." She nodded at the crumpled heap.

Chawa's eyes softened. "We'll forget our little flare of anger back there, then, eh," he laughed, softly. "Takes a little excitement to make any half-breed all Indian. You do well to aid your brother, my sister. I shall flee with the white maiden, and when we are settled in the little valley I have in mind, I shall send for you, my sister. We shall live the life of our mother's people together, we and the palefaced maiden, whose ways shall soon be our ways.

"The garments, the ways of the palefaced ones are irksome to me. I would live as lived our people, the race of great fighting braves and working squaws; I would live as live the Indians where the white race have not disturbed them.

"I know of a little valley where the virgin soil has never been defiled by the treading of the white race, where the wild deer graze in peace awaiting the song of my arrow. Ah, Mona, my sister, we shall live!" His eyes were bright now with the vision of the life he longed for, the revolver fell to his side, for the moment forgotten. His way was clear now. He loved Mona in his wild, untamed fashion; he would be glad to share his tepee with her.

"You do not understand me, my brother," Mona said, sadly.

The tone of her voice awoke Chawa, the light of the vision left his dark eyes, they were again flashing, savage. Again he covered Mona with the revolver.

"I do not fear that," she said, wearily. "I fear nothing for myself. Sometimes I would be glad to go to the great beyond."

Chawa looked at her oddly. "You love some one, eh?"

Mona's eyes fell.

Chawa eyed her intently, searchingly. "By damn, I believe you love that paleface guardian of hers," he laughed, shortly.

"Well, if you will not help me, we will drop that subject. I shall take the palefaced maiden.

You stay on. Perhaps in time some white-faced weakling will take you for his squaw," he sneered.

Mona smiled sadly. "Do not speak so, my brother. I shall not help you flee with my white friend. I shall prevent it, but you are my brother, I will help you flee alone from the scene of your crime. Go now to the ancient cave above the cave where I go with my white friend. I have kept the secret of that ancient cave all these years, not even to my white friend have I told of its existence, because you asked me not to. I would die for you, my brother, but this you ask can never be."

"You do not understand," Chawa's voice rang out passionately. "I, Chawa, love the palefaced maiden. I am consumed with love for her. My veins throb with the swift leaping of my blood at the very thought of her. I have loved her ever since I first saw her, as I now know you have loved the man. I will have her or die. I cannot live longer without her. I am mad with love of her. My blood is afire with my longing for her. I swear, by the Sun and Moon gods, I, Chawa, will have her or die."

"Chawa, my brother, speak not so," Mona pleaded. "I tell you, my brother, I indeed love the paleface man, but he loves her, my friend. They love each other, Chawa. They are of the same

race, the same pure blood, blood of the white race flows in their veins. Joan could never be happy with you, my brother. With you she would wither and fade away like a delicate flower. The fierce intensity of your love would consume her as the fire consumes the sacrificial offering. You must not commit this sin, oh, my brother!"

Chawa laughed exultantly. "Plead no more, my sister," he said, shortly.

"You will go and leave her?" Mona's voice was eager now.

"No." Chawa's voice rang out passionately.

"I shall take the palefaced maiden. She may wither, as you say, but I, Chawa, will have first held her in my arms. She shall be mine. There is no escape from the passion of Chawa. I will kill her first, then myself, if ever you lead the white men to my hiding-place. I'll take her now to the ancient cave. You shall bring us food each day until I can flee with her to the valley of which I have already spoken. Remember, before she shall be taken from me, I will kill her."

"Oh, oh, you will not kill her, Chawa. Promise me, my brother, you will never take her life!"

Chawa laughed triumphantly, laughed as a devil might laugh in an ungodly hour of triumph.

"I think you will help me now," he exulted.

"You would rather she were the mate of Chawa than like that," he spurned the Major's body with his foot."

Mona's eyes darkened with pain. "I shall never help you," she said, sadly. "I would rather see her like that than know she was your mate. Good-by, Chawa, my brother, if you take my pale-faced friend, you take her when I am like that." His eyes followed hers to the Major's body. Lithe as a panther she sprang to one side and darted toward the corner of the house. She was confident Joan was in the middle room and knew if she could reach the window of it she could enter that way and perhaps save her friend.

Chawa snarled, the revolver rang out again; its leaden messenger went home. With a cry Mona sank to the ground.

Chawa turned to enter the house, his face distorted with savage, fiendish joy. He was full of the blood-lust now. Even the silver moon looked to him like a huge red ball and the desert bathed in its light took on the same fiery hue. He laughed aloud as he started up the steps.

There were two steps, rotten with age, before the door of the cottage. Chawa caught his foot on the second step and lost his balance.

In striving to regain his balance, the hand hold-

ing the still smoking revolver crashed against the door. Another shot rang out, and Chawa fell in a heap on the lower step.

The ring of the three shots reached the three men urging their slow plodding beasts up the trail to the lonely cottage.

"My God!" the doctor cried. "What can it mean? Oh, Joan! Joan! My own little Joan. Why, oh why was I such a coward? Why did I keep silent so long? O God, God, do not let her be taken from me before she knows I am her father, before she knows I did not intentionally desert her mother."

"God grant it," the old minister said, softly, his eyes upturned to the serene sky. His fine, patriarchal face, outlined by the light of the moon, looked almost unearthly pale and hallowed. To him the firing of the three shots had but one meaning. Chawa had killed Mona, then after that interval had killed Joan, then himself. He would have almost rejoiced if the three shots had rung out in quick succession. The intermission between the first and last shots brought the intense, pained look into his eyes. His shoulders were stooped a little and he felt the springing tears, as he turned from the serene sky to the suffering man beside him—the child's father.

The shots awakened Joan. She struggled to her feet with a moaning cry. "Oh, Rodney! Rodney! Rodney!" It was for Rodney she feared now. And the fear grew in leaps and bounds while she tugged at the chain in a vain struggle to free herself. "Rodney! Rodney!" she moaned over and over.

With a cry of anguish, at the sound of the last shot, she flung herself on her knees by the bed and began to pray.

The prayer quieted her fears. She seemed to have a whispered promise of Rodney's safety. At last she sat down in her circle of ashes again. The ashes recalled her impersonification of Job. She smiled whimsically, "I can truly say with Job, 'Oh, that this day had never been for me.'"

It was a grewsome sight that met the gaze of the three men there on Lone Pine Ridge under the calm light of the moon. Grewsome yet strangely comforting. There was hope for the child.

"Dead," the doctor said, tersely, as he straightened up from his brief examination of the Major. "Dead," he repeated, after his survey of Chawa.

"Here is Mona," Dad cried, bending over her where she lay in the shadow of the great pine.

"Living, thank God," the doctor said, fervently,

as he raised his head from Mona's chest. "It's only a flesh wound, a clean miss of the shoulder bone," he announced, as he further examined the unconscious girl.

"Thank God," Dad said, reverently, lifting his wide hat from his white head.

His face was stern set, yet his eyes were soft as he looked at the upturned face of the girl, as they gently carried her out of the shadows into the soft light. The mystic light of the moon touched the beautifully chiseled face, turning it into a Madonna-like, ethereal beauty.

These keen men of the desert read clearly the story told there in all its grim setting. They needed no one to tell them Chawa had killed the Major, that Mona had talked with Chawa, implored him to spare her friend—needed no one to tell them of Chawa's refusal and that he had shot Mona as she tried to escape around the corner of the house.

That Chawa's death was accidental they also knew. Chawa's fine, dark face was set in its lines of savage triumph—Death had come too swiftly for the lines to change. His staring eyes glowed with a baleful, exultant, passionate light.

Welch dragged the dead around to the shed room at the back of the cottage, while the doctor worked

over Mona and the old minister went within to Joan.

"There," Welch grunted, as he threw a piece of canvas over the two bodies, "I'm not a cussing man generally, but I'll be damned if you haven't got your just dues—both of you—and—and if I find any harm has come to Joan—I'll forget I am a white man and drag you out for the coyotes to feed on."

He reached the doctor, still working over Mona, just as the old minister came out of the cottage.

He caught his breath sharply. "God! If any harm has come to the child."

"She is safe, boys," the old minister said, raising his hand reverently, as if in some sublime benediction.

"I found her sitting in a circle of ashes. She has been impersonating Job to keep her courage up," he added, with just a trace of amusement in his silver voice.

"By gad, I—I," Welch began, then broke off and sobbed like a baby. "I—I don't care," he blubbered. "I think it's enough to—to cry over—I'm so dad-blasted happy—I could almost forgive those dead cusses."

"She will be all right in a few hours." The doctor raised up from Mona. "And, thank God, thank God, my baby is safe."

Mona opened her eyes. "No! No! Chawa, you would not kill her."

"My God!" The doctor flung his arm across his eyes as if to shut out some horrible vision.

"I didn't tell her you were out here, boys," the old minister said, softly. "I told her I would come back for her when I found a key to the chain—the——"

"Say damned skunks, if you want to, Dad. I've cussed like a trooper and I feel better," Welch said, eagerly.

Dad smiled at Welch. "I am too full of gratitude to my heavenly Father to be profane, but I'm not reprimanding you," he added, with a twinkle in his eyes at sight of Welch's drooping face.

"We'll do the sulphur part for you, Dad," the doctor said, as he gave Mona another strengthening injection, "but did they chain her—my baby?" he demanded, his face working.

"Yes," the old man said, shortly, "but don't go in there," he pleaded, as the doctor started toward the door.

"She is overwrought, a very little more excitement would cause a nervous sick spell. I know, I know," he said, sadly. "I know. Human nature will stand only so much excitement. It would be

almost impossible for you to see her now and not reveal your relationship to her."

"You are right," the doctor's voice was husky. "I kept silent for myself, now I shall keep silent for her until she recovers from the effects of all she must have gone through. Oh, my baby! My baby!"

"I shudder to think what would have happened to her, high-strung as she is, alone here in such a place had it not been for her sublime faith in the love of God," the old minister returned, softly.

"I got it," Welch broke in triumphantly, his somber face distorted by a huge grin. He held up a peculiar-shaped key. "I've seen 'em before. Was sheriff in Texas once—seen a heap of these kind of keys there. If the old boy hadn't a prison record to his credit I am a knock-kneed donkey."

"Ah, the key to the chain's band," Dad said, quietly.

"Yes, the key to the ankle-bracelet, to give it its correct name, Dad."

The old man sighed and passed his hand wearily over his forehead, brushing back the silver strands of hair.

"We must get Mona under shelter as soon as possible," the doctor broke in, eagerly. "Now I know my baby is safe I'll take Mona down to the

village and leave you to bring Joan," he turned to the old minister.

"Jumping wild cats, where do I come in at?" Welch demanded, wagging his head mournfully.

"It will take you and I both to take Mona down very carefully," the doctor returned. "We will ride our burros side by side and hold her in our arms. We can make better time that way than if we made a litter and walked beside her."

"Good!" approved Dad. "Now, I'll go back to our child. It was necessary for me to tell her that Rodney was injured by King Solomon this morning. She feared so for him when she heard those shots, poor little girl."

"Fortunate little girl, with the love of a man like White to shield her all his life," returned the doctor.

When the doctor and Welch reached the village in the dawn's first glow, they met Prudence near Rodney's.

"It is not Joan," the doctor sang out, as Prudence ran white-faced to meet them.

"She saved her—saved little Joan. She is white through and through," Welch said, solemnly, as he and the doctor started to carry Mona into the house.

"You are a good man, Samuel." Prudence laid

her hand timidly on his shoulder. It was the first suggestion of a caress she had ever given him.

"We brought her here, because the doctor thought it would be best," Welch said, boyishly. "You are a dear woman, Prudence."

"To be sure, bring her on in, Samuel. If she was any place else Joan would have her spirit in two places and in no time would wear her body out running back and forth between her and Rodney."

The doctor smiled at the utter ignoring of him and his authority, as Prudence directed Welch where to carry the still unconscious girl.

In a few minutes Lois was there with Mona, and by the time Mona recovered her consciousness the village was ringing with the sounds of early morning activity.

"What is it, dear?" Lois asked, bending over Mona.

"Tell my uncle," Mona said, weakly. "Chawa—did—not kill himself. I was not unconscious when he fell. It was—an accident—but I am glad my friend is saved." She closed her eyes to shut her sorrow away from Lois, but Lois had seen the mist of tears in the great dark eyes and knew that while Mona rejoiced because her friend was saved, her heart was very heavy over her brother's death.

"I'll tell him, dear." Lois stooped and kissed the pale cheeks.

"I sleep now," Mona returned, gravely.

"Poor little girl," Lois said, softly, as she left the room. "How glad I am she is to recover if all goes well, and it will go well with him back of it!" She blushed and her eyes glowed with pride of her doctor.

With the fullness of the dawn came the old minister and Joan.

The doctor met them at the cottage door, telling Joan gravely and briefly that Mona was inside, injured, but sleeping quietly and must not be disturbed. His lips trembled and quivered with his desire to tell her she belonged to him—she was his child. His arms ached with his desire to hold her as a father, but he squared his shoulders in quick determination. He would wait—the child had enough to bear. He knew how she would grieve when she learned that Gray was dead. Some one must tell her, too, that the Major and Chawa were dead. His eyes followed her into the house longingly, but he turned resolutely toward the Major's hotel to send Cuby after his master's body.

At "The Sign of the Rainbow," the doctor found Cuby lying in a pool of his own blood. The negro was dying.

"De Maja done finish Cuby," the negro moaned, as the doctor bent over him.

"Why?" the doctor demanded, after he had lifted the dying man to a more comfortable position on the couch, and had forced some brandy down the closing throat.

"De Maja kill you if I tole you," Cuby said, thickly.

"The Major is dead."

An unholy light broke through the film gathering over the negro's eyes. With an effort he raised himself on his elbow. "I'll—I'll," he began, and fell back dead.

As Joan crossed the threshold into the living-room she was suddenly gathered up in the arms of the new Prudence.

"Oh, oh, it is good to be home and have you kiss me!" Joan murmured, snuggling close to Prudence as she had always secretly longed to.

"I think my latter end is going to be better than the beginning—just like Job's was," she whispered, ecstatically.

Prudence smiled at her, tenderly. "My own little Joan," she whispered, then half sobbed, "Go in to Rodney and—and cry all you want to on his shirt front."

"Thank you, Aunt Prudence," returned Joan,

suddenly grave. She longed to see Rodney, longed to have his loving arms about her, but the child was a woman now, she had crossed that invisible boundary line between childhood and womanhood up there on Lone Pine Ridge when the three shots rang out on the still air, and much as she longed to be enfolded in Rodney's arms, it was hard to tell him of Chawa's hot kisses—and tell him she must. With her hand on the doorknob, she breathed a prayer for courage.

“Hurry! Hurry! Joan! Joan!” Rodney's voice came to her, and in an instant she had flung the door open; a second and she was on her knees beside him sobbing out the whole story.

Rodney drew her to him, and as of old she nestled in the hollow of his arms, while he told her of his ride on Solomon, of Mona—of Gray, the Major, and Chawa.

When he had finished, Rodney's shirt front was indeed wet with tears.

“Aunt Prudence said I could weep on you all I wanted to-day,” Joan said at last, with a little catch in her voice.

“Yes, but if you have finished you might have something to eat,” Prudence said, in a characteristic way. Neither of them had heard her enter the room.

"Oh, Aunt Prudence, I am *so* hungry," Joan cried. "I feel like I could never get enough of your good cooking."

"Humph," Prudence grunted, happily, her eyes on Rodney's shirt front. "I see you did a good job," she commented, dryly.

Joan looked from Prudence to Rodney. "Oh, I am so happy," she cried, her face suddenly pressed against Rodney's. "I hope it is not wrong to be so happy when there is so much sorrow about us, but I can't help being happy because I am with you."

"I thought you were hungry," Prudence interrupted.

"I am," Joan cried, springing to her feet. At the door she turned and looked again at Rodney, with such a depth of love and promise in her eyes that after she was gone, he flung his arm across his eyes as if to hold there the vision of her eyes aglow with that promise.

The next day was a day given largely over to the dead at the Springs. The doctor had wired to Joe Phillips in Los Angeles. In answer came Joe Phillips, the Major's only relative and his heir. The nephew, in fulfillment of a promise made his uncle some years before, started south on the early morning train to lay his uncle's body in the old family burying ground.

In mid-afternoon Gray was tenderly, reverently laid to rest beside Arth under the same great pepper tree.

In the early twilight Cuby was buried on a low hillside near the village. And that night, shrill and loud with a primitive frenzy that seemed to pierce the sky and reach to the very edge of the desert, resounding against the mountains, re-echoing up the canyons went the sound of the voices of the Indians wailing for Chawa. The cry of a primitive people, mourning in a traditional manner for their dead—a cry that was an echo of the voice of primal man raised against the heavy hand of Fate.

CHAPTER XX

THE rosy fingers of dawn moved lightly over the throbbing desert world in a divine prelude of a golden September day, filling the ambient air with a translucent melody that no human mind could interpret. It was as though the very hand of God played the dawn's salutation to the desert world.

Its caressing influence folded itself about the man and girl standing on the steps of the cottage, waving their handkerchiefs at the man and woman in the tonneau of the great touring car speeding toward the station, across the stretch of gleaming sand fanned by the perfume-laden zephyrs of the dawn.

A silence dense and throbbing fell upon the two, on the steps, as the car vanished in the distance.

Suddenly the girl turned toward the man, and the eyes that met his were not the eyes of a child, but unutterably sweet, divinely womanly were they.

"Well, little girl," the man broke the silence. "Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Welch are making good time toward the station. They are sure to make

the East-bound Flyer. What a splendid innovation the motor is!"

Still the girl looked at him, saying nothing.

"Great wedding they had last night, wasn't it?" The man mopped his damp forehead with his handkerchief. "Aunt Prue made a very charming bride, didn't she?"

No answer.

The morning was cool but the man seemed to be suffocating. His face was pale and his mouth set in grim lines.

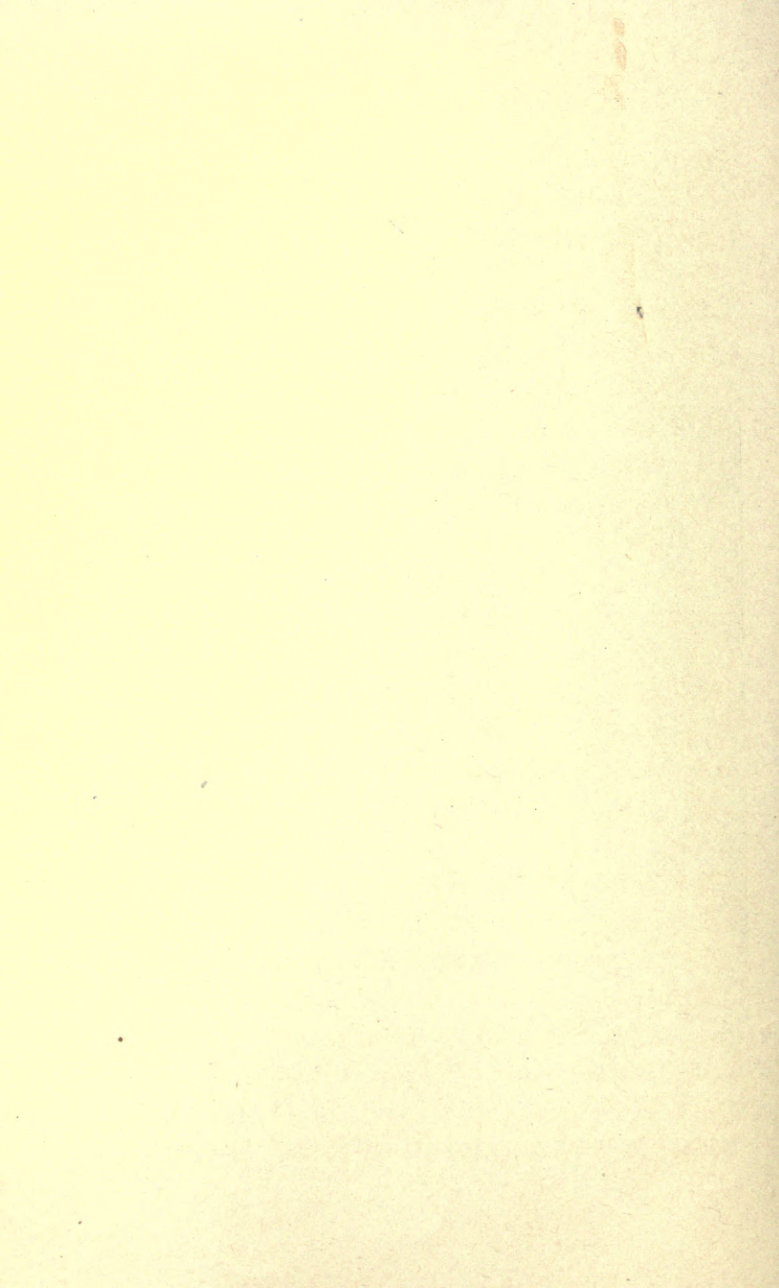
"Well, *what* are you thinking?" he demanded at last, nervously. If those tender, womanly eyes looked so steadily into his much longer he would forget his self-imposed promise to wait until she was twenty before he told her all that was in his heart to tell her now.

"Joan! Joan! Talk! Talk!" he cried at last, turning his eyes from her to the eastern sky. The prelude of the dawn was passing into the anthem of the day. From the vast stretches of the desert he gained strength to again meet those glowing eyes.

When he turned back to her, Joan's eyes fell. "It seems like the end of everything," she said, with a little catch in her voice. "Nothing will ever be the same again. Oh, Rodney! Rodney! I am



THE STRAINS OF THE VIOLIN FLOATED OUT OVER THE DESERT, FILLED
WITH LOVE AND LONGING.—Page 480.



glad Aunt Prudence is happy, but how can I leave you? Rodney, I am grateful for the life that has come to me through you. I should be willing to do anything you wish me to, I would if I believed you really wished it, but I believe the doc—my father is the instigator of it. It has been a great trial for me to give my father the love and respect a child should give *such* a father, Rodney. I must tell you this now, I thank God every night my little mother was not forsaken as I always thought she had been. I will never forget how grateful I was, for her, that day you told me all about it—how he came to leave her, I mean. I have forgiven him, Rodney, but I know she would never have been deserted had she been your wife, for there would never have been any secret about *your* marriage. But we will not talk about that, Rodney. I am glad he is to have dear Lois. I should be sorry if he knew exactly how I feel, and with Lois he will never notice how hard it is for me to feel as a daughter should toward him. Oh, Rodney! Rodney! How grateful I am you were not killed over me that dreadful day! I have always believed the Lord let your leg be broken to save you from being killed by one of those dreadful men. Rodney, tell me again that you have forgiven me for being the cause of your great worry. I should not

have left the house that night without telling you."

She turned to him, longing to have him take her in his arms. He seemed strangely reluctant about even kissing her lately. She smiled a little womanly smile of understanding, as he started toward her, then abruptly turned away again. But oh, if he would only open his arms to her, hold her close and never send her away from him, no matter how much the doctor and Dad wanted her to go away to school with Mona!

"When I come home to stay, after I have finished at Mills, I suppose I shall have to live with my father and Lois." Her voice was even, but if he could have seen her eyes they were dancing with a teasing light.

"I hope not, little girl. You certainly *shall* not if I have anything to say about it." Tenderly sweet was the man's voice.

"This is just the end of one chapter of our lives, dear," Rodney smiled at her—that peculiarly sweet smile that seemed to belong to him alone.

She moved as if to go to him. He turned and looked across the desert again.

The light died out of her eyes; they were misted with tears now.

"You and Mona will be happy at Mills," he

said, gently. "You know, you once said it was the dream of your life to go to college."

"Yes, I know I did, but I was a child then," Joan broke out, impatiently.

"And what are you now, pray?" Rodney demanded, a teasing light in his eyes, as he faced her.

Joan shrugged her shoulders and turned away.

"When Mona and I come back, we will keep old-maid hall together; how will that suit you?" she said, with studied indifference, her eyes now following the well-worn trail leading up to the Cave of Rest.

"Not if I know myself, you will not." Something in his voice thrilled her.

"What will you have to say about it, Sir Rodney?" She whirled on him, eyes aglow. "You are sending me away like a naughty child, when I begged and begged to stay here and help cheer up the poor sick boys. You know yourself I could learn right here all the Latin, and—well, everything I'll learn at Mills, just as well as leaving this beautiful place four years. Each term there will be so many things happen I'll never be able to catch up with them during vacations. Think of all that has happened this summer! 'The Sign of the Rainbow' turned into a hospital for the boys too sick to go to the hall for their meals. Just think how Don will miss

me! Aren't you ashamed to send me away, Rodney White? Why won't you let me stay here?" Now she pleaded, her voice low and tremulous.

Rodney started toward her, an unmistakable light in his eyes, then he resolutely turned away.

Joan's eyes were radiant. Given time enough she might win her way, even now. "What if I had missed that funny dicker between Mr. Phillips and my father!" she said, whimsically, recalling the day her father had purchased "The Sign of the Rainbow" from the Major's nephew.

"Oh, Rodney, I want to stay here." Her eyes were somber again, yet aglow with a hope that even at this late hour she could break down the wall of self-renunciation Rodney had erected between them. She would go happily then, if she could only leave him the promise of her love to cheer him while she was away from him.

She looked out over the desert again as if she could see the future of the hope of the consumptives—as if it were given her to see a vision of the Rainbow Springs of the future when to reach the village one passed through a land of rippling grain where cacti and greasewood now grew in stunted reluctance—as if she could see the time when Rodney and Norman Worthington carried on the great work together—as if she could hear

the voice of the future head of the nation saying with pride: "It is the garden of Eden for all those suffering from the great white plague."

"I'll—I'll bid you good-by here," Joan said at last, her lips quivering, a rosy flush staining her face. Her future was close-folded, hidden still, yet she knew the man holding her eyes now with his would some day break the silence of the next four years of earnest work—knew that a sudden shaft of Love's dazzling light would be flung athwart life's book and all the pages of the future would be illuminated as she and the man she loved—the man who loved her with *such* a perfect love—would turn the pages together, one by one, with the rhythm and music of their love.

Joan suddenly tingled all over with the romance of it all. After all she could and would wait patiently. It would be *so* thrilling to think of that hour when he would tell her all his eyes told her now. Her eyes glowed iridescently. She tilted her head to one side and stood listening as if she caught the measure of some wonderful strain of music played only to her.

"It is time to come now," said the old minister, softly. A tender smile played about his mouth.

So unconscious of his approach had they been that Joan gave a little involuntary cry of surprise

at the sound of his voice. Her eyes grew misty again.

"Four years seem like a lifetime to you now, little girl," he said, gently, reading her aright. "But they will pass before you realize it and you will, for them, be all the better fitted for the life which will be yours here where the spirit of God is so divinely with us."

"Oh, Dad! Dad! I love it so here," she cried. "I always wanted to go to college as Rodney just reminded me. It was the dream of my life when I was a poor little hand-me-around orphan and I want a better education now, Dad, dear. I do indeed want it, but these last three years have been so like heaven to me it's hard to think about leaving you and—and Rodney. I am grateful because I am going to Mills, Dad, but I shall miss you all so! Oh, what would I do if Mona were not going with me?" her voice broke.

"Yes, I know," the old minister said, gravely. "I think I understand exactly how you feel, dear. But you must not cry, Mona is going with you, and we want our girls to be the pride of Mills, don't we, Rodney?"

Rodney nodded. He could not trust his voice to speak.

Dad laid his hand lightly on Joan's head. His

face was transfigured, illumined with an inner glory. "The future is all golden for you, dear." There was the light of prophecy in his eyes now. "And when you and Mona come back to us to stay, we will have such a garden as was mine in those old golden days of mine in the sunny south-land. Our flowers will be the lace upon the desert's altar cloth. We will have an abundance of clove pinks, lassie, pinks that will gladden the hearts of the lads who come to us—the girls, too—for the girls will be coming soon to the doctor's wonderful Hall of Hope. Aye, the lassies will come, for the disease that will be stamped out here fastens itself upon them, too," he sighed. He had almost forgotten the presence of the man and the girl.

"There comes Mona," Joan cried, suddenly.

The old minister turned to them again with a low musical laugh. "She and Graham were dawn-gazing together when I started over here. I heard Graham say: 'Well, by Jove, you simply must write to a chap, you know.' I believe she will do it, too," he added. Mona had been very gentle and kind to Graham ever since she recovered from her wound. He had been so wonderfully kind to her while she was convalescing after that terrible night on Lone Pine Ridge. He was such a frank, manly fellow and so earnestly in love with her, she could not

but pity him—and pity is a dangerous ally of the little love god, but Mona was serenely unconscious of this, as she gave Graham a laughing half promise to write him.

“I will go on with Mona to the hall,” Dad said, noting with a gleam of amusement in his kind eyes the shadows that had unconsciously fallen on the faces of the man and maid when he joined them.

“And you’ll play the ‘Ave Maria’ as we start off. I can stand it better if you do—and—and, so can you,” said the woman-wise Joan, as she looked into Rodney’s love-lit eyes, as they drew near the Hall of Hope.

From within came shouts of joy—the boys were most certainly enjoying themselves.

“Yes, I’ll play the ‘Ave Maria,’ little girl, but I wanted to go to the train with you.”

“I—I couldn’t stand that,” Joan’s voice was shaky. “It will take all the thrill of the dash in the automobile to keep me from being a baby as it is. If I had to face parting from my beloved guardian at the train—I could never stand it—never! Never! I’ll have to pray—pray as I never prayed before to stand it, anyway. I’ll have to pray every minute, Rodney White,” her voice broke. She had intended to be very grave—had even intended to say something to tease him when she said “my

beloved guardian," he hated to be called guardian so badly, but, she thought, with a quivering of her lips, "there is nothing humorous about anything."

"What a dear child it is," Rodney smiled—then added, softly, "And remember, Joan—my own little Joan—I love you——"

"Oh!" She turned eager eyes to him—"Well, as any proper guardian should love his ward," he finished, lamely, and drew her into the hall of mirth.

At the end of the hall on a low platform under a wedding bell of white carnations stood the doctor and Lois, eyes alight, faces aglow with love's promise of the future.

Just in front of them stood the old minister. About them in groups were the boys. At one side stood Martha with an arm about Mona. Joan hastened to join Martha and Mona. She and Rodney both were serenely unconscious of the exchange of smiles that greeted their entrance to the hall.

Slowly, impressively, the old minister read the beautiful marriage service while the voice of Rodney's violin rang out in a dainty, delicate obligato—a melody as delicate in structure as was the instrument itself.

To all but Joan, the music was simply an exquisite

melody, bright and airy as shimmering moonlight, dainty as the song of a rippling brook gliding through the green aisles of some magic forest—a sweet promise of life itself, but to Joan it was more than that—it was all that, too. To her it was a thrill with the song of the first man for the first woman. It sounded through her consciousness, calling, calling, calling to the depths of her soul, and Rodney, looking past that other man and woman, read love's answer in her eyes—read and was satisfied.

Just as the doctor and his wife stepped into the purring machine waiting for them in front of the hall, a very beautiful and symbolic thing happened. On the ragged spur of a giant mountain peak, suddenly appeared the head of an Indian chief—outlined as it was against the sun-bright sky, the grim lips were curved into a kindly smile.

“Oh! Oh, Rodney, look!” Joan cried from her place on the middle seat of the huge car.

Rodney tucked his violin under his arm and came close to the side of the pulsating machine throbbing to be off across the desert expanse, quivering like some live thing poised ready for flight.

With his hands holding hers, they watched the head of the ancient chief fade away, its place taken

almost instantly by the ancient city with its thousand spires piercing the sky.

The doctor broke the tense silence which held them all spellbound. Even the group of boys, waiting to fling a shower of rice upon the doctor and Lois the instant the car started, were silent.

"We'll return next week, old man," the doctor said, smiling at Rodney. "We shall get our girls settled at Mills, spend a day or so at Santa Barbara on our way down the coast, then home, eh, dear?" he turned to Lois.

She raised glowing eyes to him, "Then home," she returned, softly.

"By Jove, you know I'll expect a letter next week and—and I'll get a fever up if it doesn't come on time, a regular hummer of a fever, and you know how cross a fever makes the doctor—so you'd better write, Mona, dear," the voice of Graham, unconsciously raised in the intensity of his feelings, rang out clear and distinct. He had been carrying on a low-voiced conversation with Mona ever since the mirage of the ancient city had faded away.

Above the laugh that followed, the doctor's voice rang clear, "You'll do, Graham—I promise you Mona shall not be allowed to cause your temperature to rise." And then the big car shot suddenly forward. The silver voice of the old minister followed

it in a sublime benediction, while the strains of the violin floated out over the desert, filled with love and longing, a-quiver with passion and pain, throbbing with an ecstasy of renunciation, thrilling with the promise of the future, as Rodney's fingers swept caressingly over the responsive strings shaping the melody Joan loved best—the exquisite "Ave Maria."

THE END

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